

FIRST THINGS

A Monthly Journal of Religion and Public Life

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In Theology

Avery Dulles

In History

Gertrude Himmelfarb

The Disputed Legacy of Reinhold Niebuhr
Matthew Berke

Caring About Women, Caring for the Unborn
A Declaration

Opinions and Reviews: The Innovationist Edge
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A Monthly Journal of Religion and Public Life

NOVEMBER 1992 • NUMBER 27

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Editor-in-Chief: *Richard John Neuhaus*
Editor: *James Nuechterlein*
Managing Editor: *Matthew Berke*
Poetry Editor: *Nathan A. Scott, Jr.*
Publisher: *Institute on Religion and Public Life*
Publishing Services: *Publishing Management Associates*

FIRST THINGS: A Monthly Journal of Religion and Public Life (ISSN #1047-5141) is published monthly (except for combined issues June/July and August/September) for \$24 per year by The Institute on Religion and Public Life, 156 Fifth Avenue, Suite 400, New York, NY 10010. Second class postage paid at New York, NY and additional mailing office. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to FIRST THINGS, P.O. Box 3000, Dept. FT, Denville, NJ 07834. **Editorial Offices:** The Institute on Religion and Public Life, 156 Fifth Avenue, Suite 400, New York, NY 10010. **Editorial Phone:** (212) 627-1985. **Advertising Offices:** 129 Phelps Avenue, Suite 312, Rockford, IL 61108. **Advertising Phone:** (815) 398-8569. **Subscription Department:** P.O. Box 3000, Dept. FT, Denville, NJ 07834. Unsolicited material cannot be returned unless accompanied by sufficient return postage. Newsstand distribution by Eastern News Distributors, Inc., 1130 Cleveland Rd., Sandusky, OH 44870. Copyright ©1992 by The Institute on Religion and Public Life. All rights reserved.

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FIRST THINGS

FIRST THINGS is published by Religion and Public Life, an interreligious, nonpartisan research and education institute whose purpose is to advance a religiously informed public philosophy for the ordering of society. RPL also sponsors scholars conferences, consultations, research projects, public educational events, and a fellows program.

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Beyond Good Will

Alan L. Mittleman's "Christianity in the Mirror of Jewish Thought" (August/September) sets forth an uncommonly interesting and well-crafted thesis. Considering the trivialization of the Judeo-Christian dialogue, its reduction to an exchange of condescension on the one side and dissimulation on the other, I appreciated Mittleman's clear and persuasive revision of the subject.

At a recent meeting, I found myself hectoring and abused by the [moderator] for insisting that there really were substantive theological obstacles to dialogue, and that unless these are forthrightly addressed, no authentic intellectual bridges can be built. In exchange, he offered friendship and good will between individual Christians and Jews. When I insisted that religion is public, shared, and a fact of the social order, not to be reduced to Mrs. Cohen's and Mrs. Wigglesworth's having tea together, he closed the meeting with some very unfriendly remarks.

The monumental irrelevance of mere good will is exposed in Rabbi Mittleman's compelling schema.

Jacob Neusner
Dept. of Religious Studies
University of South Florida
Tampa, FL

Contra Dannhauser

Werner J. Dannhauser's "Letter from Jerusalem" (June/July) calls for a response. Dannhauser correctly comments that when he arrives in Jerusalem from Paris, he has "delt into what used to be called the mysterious East."

The mystery for Dannhauser is his basic alienation from the culture he describes. He looks at and comments upon a culture, grounded in a religion that is strange to him because he is estranged from it, from the perspective of the alien. Unfortunately, too many Jews are alienated from their religious culture.

First, the facts. Dannhauser is incorrect in his claim that the skull cap is not mentioned in the *Shulhan*

Aruch, the standard code of traditional Jewish law. On one occasion, Rabbi Karo opines that it is a requirement, and yet on another he requires that the headgear be worn [only] when entering a synagogue. In Talmudic times, the male head was covered only by sages, and it is this usage that is recorded by Maimonides. Today, religious Israelis wear the head covering. It is ironic indeed that those who believe that Judaism "evolves" are quick to point out that the Jewish male headgear is not specifically legislated by Talmudic law. As if they were committed to living with community "under the law." . . .

While Dannhauser is prepared to suffer quaint superstitions on aesthetic grounds, he is also prepared to violate the Sabbath in Tel Aviv, albeit while celebrating the tradition of "family life." If Judaism is mere ethnicity, it is religiously trivial, and if Judaism is an ultimate concern, it makes demands and it issues commands, however inconvenient.

I share Dannhauser's impatience with those whom he calls, out of convention, "ultra-Orthodox," but for radically different reasons. Dannhauser deems them to be unduly parochial and unpatriotic, for they do not serve in the Israeli army. As a Jew committed to Jewish law, which does not recognize *a priori* political or ideological slogans as part of Jewish law, I judge the *haredim* (which means those who quake at the word of the Lord, not unlike the American Shakers) before the grid of Jewish law. The Law does not require that one dress in heavy black in the heat of summer, but it does require all Jews to defend their Jewish state in the face of hostile aggressors. Jewish law makes no exemption in cases of defensive war for full-time, lifelong yeshiva students or for women. Maimonides goes so far as to contend that those who claim that society owes them a living because they are religious scholars are profaning God's name and have forfeited their portion in the world to come. . . .

When FIRST THINGS reports the Judaism of assimilating, intermarried Jews, or Jews whose religiosity is expressed in non-Jewish terms, it is not doing justice to truth. . . . By viewing Judaism as a quantitative commitment to ritual, without viewing those rituals in the context of what Jewish Law actually requires, one unwittingly imposes a Christian value grid upon Jewish life. Allowing a religiously inconsistent Jew to express this view does not make it any less offensive to practicing Jewish believers. . . .

Rabbi Allan J. Yuter
Congregation Israel
Springfield, NJ

Werner J. Dannhauser's "Letter From Jerusalem" was a poignant description of the dynamic variety of Jewishness one can find in Israel. But for me there was a painful omission. Nowhere is the Christian presence in Israel even mentioned.

Dannhauser has every right to write what he saw, and he did set his sights on describing Israeli Jewishness. But surely the presence of many edifices in Jerusalem of great historic importance to Christians should have led him to inquire what Israeli Jews thought about those Christian families whose roots in Israel go back centuries. Of the estimated 130,000 Christians in Israel, around 37,000 are Palestinian Christians with ancient ties to the country. It is sad to think that the fate of this population is simply submerged into "the Palestinian problem" in the minds of so many.

For Dannhauser's next visit to Jerusalem, permit me to recommend a stop at the Notre Dame of Jerusalem Center. It houses three restaurants and is located near the New Gate of the Old City. He may even want to visit the Ecole Biblique, the foremost Christian institution of biblical studies.

George B. Pepper
Brewster, MA

Indian Democracy?

I read with interest "Hindu Nationalism, Indian Democracy" by Myron Weiner (June/July). One wonders

how this academic intellectual failed to grasp the truth about India. I will briefly dwell on the issues raised:

1. On the first anniversary of Indian independence, Mr. Purshottam Das Tandon, the Congress party president, declared, "There should not be any more talk of separate culture and language in the Indian union. There should be no room for such persons in India who advocate separate culture and separate language. . . ." Nehru's idea of secularism had a different meaning: he constructed a Hindu temple after demolishing a Mosque at Somnath—all paid for by the "secular" state in 1951. . . . Nehru wrote Article 25 of the Indian constitution, declaring the Sikhs, Buddhists, and Jains [to be] Hindus, thereby converting *en masse* millions of people to Hinduism.

2. The 1992 annual report of Freedom House has downgraded India's democracy to the category of "partly free." I refer the reader to the memorandum of the National Center for Public Policy Research of June 1987 which stated, "India in 1987 is a nation in which religious persecution is encouraged by law, where the government does not protect citizens from a system of permanent servitude. . . ." [In addition,] the Forty-fourth Amendment to the Indian constitution abolished the right to private property. . . .

3. Perhaps unknown to Mr. Weiner, groups such as Amnesty International (AI), Asia Watch, and the International Red Cross have all been barred from entering India for many years. In spite of that, AI reports on India are enormous. One should read the 195 pages of AI's March 1992 report, *India: Torture, Rape & Deaths in Custody*. There are also reports prepared by the U.S. Congressional Research Service outlining India's gross violation of human rights. There also exist numerous reports on India's terrible human rights record prepared by human rights organizations located within India. . . .

4. Mr. Weiner talks about free elections in India. Free elections for what purpose? In the last two parliamentary elections, Rajiv Gandhi

and other senior Hindu political party leaders promised the Hindu masses that they would bring about *Rama Rajya*—a Hindu utopia, hardly anything resembling a democracy. You often hear announcements that the citizens of respective Indian states elect their own local state governments. How wonderful! But nobody will tell you that since 1950 more than one hundred duly elected state governments have been dissolved arbitrarily by India's central government.

G. B. Singh
Waynesville, MO

Myron Weiner replies:

Mr. G. B. Singh argues that my article fails to report that India is neither democratic, since there are numerous human rights violations, nor secular, since, he writes, the government has been converting peoples to Hinduism.

The charge by Amnesty International that India's poorly disciplined paramilitary forces and police have used excessive force in Kashmir, Punjab, and Assam is well substantiated, leading Freedom House to downgrade India's rating to "partially free." Such abuses, alas, are not uncommon where terrorist movements are active and they make a political settlement more difficult, but it would be a gross exaggeration to assert therefore that India is not democratic. Nor has the government abolished the right to private property. India has a vital and expanding private sector, encouraged by the liberal economic reforms pursued by Prime Minister Narasimha Rao.

Is India converting millions to Hinduism? Article 25 of the Indian constitution provides that Hindu temples must be open to all Hindus, a provision intended to end the ban on the entry of untouchables into temples. The article goes on to say that for this purpose the term "Hindu" shall include Jains, Buddhists, and Sikhs, who are thereby guaranteed the right of temple entry. India's Hindu leaders regarded this provision as an expression of Hinduism's inclusiveness. In recent years many Sikhs have pointed to this

provision as an indication that Hindus do not recognize an independent Sikh, Jain, or Buddhist identity. In a political environment in which religious communities are seeking to draw sharp boundaries around their identities, the inclusiveness that characterizes the Hindu self-image is now seen as threatening to others. Advocates of an independent Sikh state, Khalistan, have denounced this provision, but this is a political posture; there is no Hindu campaign to convert Sikhs.

In practice, moreover, Indian law permits both religious and linguistic diversity. For example, on matters of marriage, divorce, and inheritance Muslims can follow their own religious laws. Indeed, many secular-minded Indians argue that there ought to be a uniform civil code applicable to all Indians. In deference to Muslim sensibilities the government of India banned Salman Rushdie's book, another policy opposed by many secular democratic-minded Indians. As for linguistic freedom, there are a dozen official regional languages in India.

In my article I argue that Hindu nationalism is a growing political force in India and that it has exacerbated relations between Hindus and other religious communities. Popular support for the Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party has grown with the rise of Sikh separatism and Islamic fundamentalism; as elsewhere, religious extremists nurture one another.

Meilaender on Marriage

Thanks to Gilbert Meilaender for "Marriage in Counterpoint and Harmony" (June/July). It is the most thoughtful treatment I've seen on the "problem of attempts to take seriously headship within marriage." Would that many would think so deeply on these matters, and begin to deal with the paradoxes as well as the profound realities and mysteries of gender.

Leanne Payne
Milwaukee, WI

I began reading "Marriage in Counterpoint and Harmony" anticipating

that "The Lutheran Difference" (Mark Noll, February) would be significant for fellow Lutheran Gilbert Meilaender when unraveling the mystery of faithfulness and unity in marriage. Almost immediately I wondered whether the "embarrassment" [of St. Paul on headship in marriage] is that Paul says the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the Church, or that Meilaender neglects to ask what Paul means by *kephale*, the Greek for head. He assumes that being head is a role associated with the place and concept of "headship." What about the wife and the role of "bodyship"? I kept reading in hope of some reference to Luther's understanding of the Church as the body of Christ, but found only an appeal to Barth's concept of order.

Interpreting what Ephesians 5 teaches about marriage must include understanding what *kephale* meant to the original readers. There are seven passages in the New Testament where Paul uses *kephale* in a figurative way. . . . One of the most comprehensive Greek lexicons, a work by Liddell, Scott, Jones, and McKenzie, gives no evidence that *kephale* was associated with a role exercised by one having the final say. Numerous instances have been found where *kephale* denotes originator and completer, source, top or crown, provider, and being preeminent as a person or thing from which something else is derived or obtained. If *kephale* did not normally mean the role to which a last ditch appeal is made for permanence in a relationship, what might Paul be saying of the husband as *kephale*?

Paul uses *kephale* to give a rich exalted picture of the living Christ and His present relationship to the Church. When *kephale* is read with recognized Greek meanings familiar to Paul's original readers, the passages where Paul refers to Christ as *kephale* are consistent with what the Church confesses of Christ, the One from whom she came into being and whose love brings forth her faithfulness and their unity. Neither equality or interchangeability enter a discussion that has to do with recognizing

what Christ continually gives from within Himself to the Church. . . .

Paul is confident that God created a living Church faithful to the head from and for whom she came into being. Neither head or body are associated with either a role, a requirement, or an ideal toward which Christ and the Church must strive. If the permanence of their relationship is linked to Christ having the last word when they might otherwise separate, it is the Law that binds them to each other. . . .

Paul would have husband and wife live believing they are members of the one holy catholic Church. A husband cannot be head as Christ is his head unless he, in faith, knows and "sees" self as the body of Christ. Then being *kephale* is not an ideal, however lovingly and well-intentioned it is perceived, toward which the husband must struggle. Rather, he is called to the obedience of faith, i.e., to live believing that he has been given the will to be head of the wife as Christ is the head of the Church.

Paradoxically, Paul's understanding of *kephale* does not diminish, but gives glory to being the body. He uses the embodiment of the wife, not to teach that she has a prescribed role of "bodyship," but for all who are the church to understand who they are as body in relationship to Christ. . . . Neither husband or wife need fear submission and unity with the other any more than they fear being the Church in relation to Christ.

Paul makes no distinction between husband and wife in their willingness to be faithful and surrender self to one who is totally other. Unity and permanence in marriage must come from outside both through One who is united to each and from whom both receive the will to love selflessly. Both need to be free from the idea that they have responsibility for the "last word" that holds marriages together. . . .

It seems to me that husband and wife are indeed two distinct melodies, who, when brought together, combine into a single harmonious melody where each retain their distinctiveness. It is in being distinct that the wife can know who they are

as the Church. Maintaining the independence of the wife is not for her self-realization, but so that she may be a counterpart embodying a dimension of humanity that gives the husband a sense of self-awareness and sociability rooted in sexual difference and attraction. . . . Her submission to the husband is significant precisely because she is surrendering the totality of who she is as an independent person, not simply filling a role determined by her embodiment. . . .

Today, the idea of roles is helpful in explaining why people behave the way they do. Certainly behavior can be enhanced when one has a "role model" to observe and follow. But Paul does not establish separate fixed patterns of behavior for husband and wife to maintain their unity of heart and mind. Neither husband nor wife were created for a "role" to which they must aspire, but to be of one heart and mind in their distinct bodies. . . .

I am convinced that Professor Meilaender and I share a common concern for faithfulness in marriage. For this reason I look forward to further discussion of how husband and wife receive the grace to be of one heart and mind in a monogamous, heterosexual procreative union. . . .

Marie Meyer
Garden City, NY

Gilbert Meilaender replies:

I confess that almost the whole of Marie Meyer's long letter (here edited to somewhat shorter length) is unclear to me. Any response that I make runs the risk, therefore, of misconstruing her position. Still, I will do my best and offer apologies for where I have failed.

In my article I discuss two different notions of headship (building on passages from C. S. Lewis and Helmut Thielicke). Ms. Meyer does not seem to distinguish carefully between these. As best I can tell, she thinks the Thielicke approach mistaken but actually has a good bit of sympathy for the Lewis approach. For we are agreed, I think, that husband and wife—though united—are not interchangeable. And we may even be

agreed that the distinctiveness and otherness of each is necessary if we are to learn what it means to relate to the ultimately other Lord who is head of his body, the Church. But she seems unwilling or unable to say anything about the nature of this differentiation, which in turn makes it hard to know what we might learn from it. Still, since my inquiry was partially about whether anything could be said on this matter, and since I was very tentative in my discussion, there may be room here for some meeting of the minds.

For some other matters in her letter I have a hard time working up sympathy. She takes me to task, it seems, for being insufficiently Lutheran—an old Lutheran trick, I should warn readers who lack the necessary personal history. I suspect, though, that we have quite different notions about what is needed here. I do not think that theological ethics can usefully be done on the basis of word studies, since for me the unit of thought is not the single word. I think Lutherans who ignore Barth—on this or quite a few other matters—do so at their theological peril. I do not think being Lutheran means one must shrink from describing marriage as a task. And I firmly believe that the attempt to spin all moral wisdom out of the gospel is the characteristic failing of Lutheran ethics. Of such sins, therefore, I am unable to repent.

Wittgenstein's Religiosity

While Edward T. Oakes' article "Ludwig Wittgenstein Confesses" (June/July) has an interesting thesis, I feel it missed an opportunity for examining the profundity of Wittgenstein's Jewishness upon his later work. Nowhere is this influence more apparent than in the *Philosophical Investigations* where, as Oakes rightly points out, Wittgenstein turned away from philosophy's efforts to find a single essential meaning for words to locating the meaning of words in their uses. One of the reasons Wittgenstein was able to make this shift was because his imagination was primarily captured not by the Greek visualist paradigm

of reality, but by the Hebraic dynamism of the spoken word. Wittgenstein himself, in conversation with O. C. Drury in response to Drury's Origenist sympathies, said, "Your religious ideas have always seemed to me more Greek than biblical. Whereas my thoughts are one hundred percent Hebraic" (cited by Fergus Kerr in *Theology After Wittgenstein*). Furthermore, Wittgenstein stated that a motto for the whole of his later philosophy might be Goethe's phrase from *Faust*, "In the beginning was the deed." Here we see Wittgenstein's reliance upon the Hebrew *davar*, which means both word and deed. Such Hebraic formation at the depth of Wittgenstein's imagination enabled him to make the radical philosophical moves he made. And such formation is, as Oakes notes, certainly ignored in most philosophy departments in what Wittgenstein himself called "the darkness of this time."

Beth Newman
Saint Mary's College
Notre Dame, IN

The beauty of Ray Monk's biography of Ludwig Wittgenstein is that it presents a balanced account of Wittgenstein's life. Its author refrains from harnessing his story to a cherished ideological load. Precisely this balance enables Edward T. Oakes to raise his stimulating questions concerning, chiefly, "Wittgenstein's deep religiosity" and "the influence of his Jewishness on his life." Both topics would seem to merit finer differentiations.

Scholars have endeavored to glean something about Wittgenstein's religiosity from his writings as well as from his statements reported by contemporaries. However, it is well to be cautious in the extreme when employing like common coinage Wittgenstein's precisely chosen words, especially when, of necessity, they are pried loose from their rigorously argued context.

To be sure, Wittgenstein's texts, like those of other writers, are open to multiple interpretations; moreover, Wittgenstein himself incorporated differences in understanding in

his epistemology. . . .

Wittgenstein's apparently unambiguous "God does not reveal himself in the world" is regarded by Ingeborg Bachmann as "one of the bitterest sentences in the *Tractatus*," whereas G. H. von Wright, less emotively, deduces from its juxtaposition with the preceding sentence that Wittgenstein was not a pantheist. Not mutually exclusive, these two responses illustrate how one of Wittgenstein's concise statements elicits differing responses. . . .

Seeking answers to our questions in Wittgenstein's texts may be an undertaking justified in its own right, but it leads away from Wittgenstein because each of his formulations struggles with an answer to his own questions. We may serve Wittgenstein better by listening for his questions than by looking for solutions to crucial problems in our own minds. In particular, Oakes' note of triumphalism in winning Wittgenstein for the cause of religion has a ring alien to Wittgenstein's approach.

This is not to say that Wittgenstein may not have been religious—he may well have been. One who on various occasions considered joining a monastery was probably not anti-religious or even areligious.

If Wittgenstein was religious, he was so in and on his own terms, not in our everyday understanding of that notion. We would require a demonstration that Oakes' and Wittgenstein's assumptions regarding "religion" were at all comparable.

Oakes sees in Wittgenstein's need for "confession" at various times in his life one proof of Wittgenstein's religiosity. However, such a need, for Wittgenstein and in general, is not necessarily or chiefly a religious one.

. . . .

Fania Pascal's assessment of Wittgenstein's Jewishness, quoted by Monk and paraphrased by Oakes, needs careful reading. Fania Pascal, Wittgenstein's teacher of Russian, identified herself as "a Jewish girl from the Ukraine, who had been through pogroms during the Civil War, whose childhood was darkened, branded by the anti-Semitism of

Tsarist Russia." Her Jewish self-awareness differed radically from the Jewish self-awareness of the assimilating Jews of Vienna—if, for the moment, Wittgenstein might be reckoned as one of them. Furthermore, Pascal herself, with unconcealed irritation at her own bad memory and/or her failure at the time to make distinctions she should have made, later said of their conversation:

I cannot be sure, but in his precise way he [Wittgenstein] may have used the term Aryan, non-Aryan throughout, not Jewish or non-Jewish, a very significant difference in his case and at that time. Mistakenly I took it for granted at the time that his words implied that he had three Jewish grandparents, in the sense that they were members of the Jewish community. . . .

At the time of this "confession" to her, six months before the *Anschluss*, Wittgenstein had returned from a visit to Austria. In view of the fact that Austria and Germany were working on political agreements, one can assume with virtual certainty that members of Wittgenstein's family, baptized into the Christian faith, were seriously and justifiably concerned how the Nürnberg legislation (1935) about race might soon affect their status. . . .

It is important for us today to be aware that, before the spread of Nazi race theories, baptized Jews in Vienna were converts to Christianity and members of the Catholic or Protestant Church. They had ceased being Jews. Jewishness had hitherto been a matter of creed. Only after the imposition of Nazi race laws did the term "non-Aryan" become synonymous with Jewish—hence Fania Pascal's admitted confusion. Oakes employs these terms interchangeably. If "Aryan" and "non-Aryan" were the words Wittgenstein used in his "confession" to his Russian teacher, he had adopted Nazi terminology.

It is Fania Pascal's evaluation of Wittgenstein's confession that

should be of interest to Oakes and to us. She implies that it would have been an offense if Wittgenstein had been actively or passively misleading with respect to the exact admixture of racial strains in him. Note that her understanding of his words does not relate to religion, creed, or Wittgenstein's religiosity. It has to do with whether or not he saw himself as a Jew in Hitlerian terms, and whether or not he gave the impression of distancing himself, actively or through inaction, from the Jewish community as defined by Nazi laws. Pascal condemns Wittgenstein for disloyalty to the Jewish community as a racial group, as Hitler stipulated.

Oakes appears to adopt Pascal's premise uncritically, while at the same time using it as a proof of Wittgenstein's religiosity: he appears to accept at face value Pascal's perception of Wittgenstein's need to confess, namely his need to confess that he conveyed or permitted a misleading impression about racially belonging to a group, in percentile terms different from the true ones.

This "confession" proves little about Wittgenstein's religiosity, one way or the other. It does show, however, how completely Hitler's terminology prevailed in Pascal's perception, and prevails unrecognized even now when Wittgenstein's (Jewish) religion is unquestioningly measured with Hitler's yardstick.

At the time of his "confession" to Pascal and others, a bewildered Wittgenstein may have felt guilt for any number of reasons, so that the bewildering quotation attributed to him, complete with Pascal's doubt about its literalness, may have been a psychological displacement of sorts.

In short: the adoption, for our own purposes, of Wittgenstein's crafted utterances, our utilization of his philosophical road signs, as it were, may lead to pleasurable digressions, to finding "sermons in stones," but surely away from Wittgenstein's frame of reference.

Elizabeth Petuchowski
Cincinnati, OH

Edward T. Oakes replies:

Elizabeth Petuchowski is right of course: both topics merit finer differentiations. First of all, let me add to her clarifications one of my own: it was far from my intention to expropriate Wittgenstein "for the cause of religion." His was clearly an honesty and an integrity that was fashioned out of intense internal reflection and not from any receptiveness to organized religion, whether Jewish or Christian. But that does not mean the issue is quite so ambiguous as Ms. Petuchowski seems to aver. ("He may well have been [religious]. One who on various occasions considered joining a monastery was probably [!] not anti-religious or even areligious.") "Religion" is perhaps not a happy term in this context, but what I specified in the article as his "deep religiosity" was meant to refer to something much deeper than occasional moments when he thought of becoming a monk.

Indeed, I think it would be to misunderstand Wittgenstein to say that he was primarily a philosopher of religion, for that too would imply the same narrow category that seems to have prompted Ms. Petuchowski's letter. But I do claim that Wittgenstein became a philosopher in the first place because of an intense mystical experience he had before World War I—a point missed by Monk in his otherwise fine biography and stressed, to the best of my knowledge, only by Russell Nieli in his book *Wittgenstein: From Mysticism to Ordinary Language* (1987). According to Nieli (and Wittgenstein's sister Hermine confirms this), Wittgenstein never would have turned from aerodynamic engineering to philosophy without having experienced the Unutterable, an experience that later led him to say in the *Tractatus*, "We feel that even if all possible scientific questions have been answered, our life problems have not even been touched in the slightest"; or, "The solution of the riddle of life in space and time lies outside space and time." My claim was solely that attempts by the logical positivists to see Section 8 of

the *Tractatus* merely as the appendicized musings of a logician who had finished his main work are utterly wrong.

Finally I am grateful to Ms. Petuchowski's "clarification" (if that is the word, for her information muddles an already cloudy picture) of Fania Pascal's memories of Wittgenstein's confession of his Jewishness. I suppose that, as so often with Wittgenstein, naming that experience with a label will only keep us from an exact description of the nature and power of his mind. Let me say that whether as an insider or an outsider to either Judaism or Christianity, Wittgenstein has been a model to me of unsparing honesty, relentless pursuit of moral purity (however successfully or unsuccessfully effected), and radiant, if dauntingly lonely, holiness. If I understand him correctly, I do not think I could agree with him that "God does not reveal himself in the world," but that only heightens the challenge that so noble a figure represents to me.

Orthodox Concerns

As it stands, Richard John Neuhaus' "Orthodox Healings" (The Public Square, June/July) is badly in need of a summary. As one conversant in the matters that he addresses, I would like to venture one.

There is a most obvious deduction from the facts—(1) that Orthodox leaders are incensed at "missionary incursions" being made by Roman Catholics and Protestants, and (2) that the Orthodox Church suffers from internal discord—which Mr. Neuhaus cites. It is a deduction belying his muddled treatment of the issues. Simply put, we Orthodox are far more concerned with the reality that our Eastern brethren are being inundated by seductive (and anyone who has had contact with these formerly culturally sequestered Easterners knows how attractive *anything* Western seems to them) Western half-truths such as Roman Catholicism and Protestantism than we are about the non-dogmatic divisions within our own Church. If, as Mr. Neuhaus seems to be suggesting, there is some inconsistency in

U.S. Postal Service
**STATEMENT OF OWNERSHIP,
MANAGEMENT AND CIRCULATION**

- 1A. Title of publication: FIRST THINGS.
- 1B. Publication No. 005476.
2. Date of Filing: Sept. 20, 1992.
3. Frequency of Issue: Monthly except combined issues June/July and August/September.
- 3A. No. of Issues Published Annually: 10.
- 3B. Annual Subscription Price: \$24.
4. Mailing Address of Known Office of Publication: 156 Fifth Avenue, Suite 400, New York, NY 10010-7002.
5. Mailing Address of the Headquarters of General Business Offices of the Publisher: 156 Fifth Avenue, Suite 400, New York, NY 10010-7002.
6. Names and Complete Addresses of Publisher, Editor, and Managing Editor: Publisher: Institute on Religion and Public Life, 156 Fifth Avenue, Suite 400, New York, NY 10010-7002. Publisher: Father Richard John Neuhaus, 156 Fifth Avenue, Suite 400, New York, NY 10010-7002. Editor: James Nuechterlein, 156 Fifth Avenue, Suite 400, New York, NY 10010-7002. Managing Editor: Matthew Berke, 156 Fifth Avenue, Suite 400, New York, NY 10010-7002.
7. Owner: Institute on Religion and Public Life, 156 Fifth Avenue, Suite 400, New York, NY 10010-7002.
8. Known Bondholders, Mortgagees, and Other Security Holders Owning or Holding 1 Percent or More of Total Amount of Bonds, Mortgages or Other Securities: None.
9. The Purpose, Function, and Nonprofit Status of This Organization and the Exempt Status for Federal Income Tax Purposes: Has Not Changed During the Preceding 12 Months.
10. Extent and Nature of Circulation:

	Avg. No. Copies Each Issue During Preceding 12 Months	Actual No. Copies of Single Issue Nearest to Filing Date
A. Total No. Copies (Net Press Run)	18,650	20,600
B. Paid Circulation		
1. Sales through Dealers and Carriers, Street Vendors and Counter Sales	644	1,400
2. Mail Subscriptions	15,319	17,623
C. Total Paid Circulation (Sum of 10B1 and 10B2)	15,963	19,023
D. Free Distribution by Mail, Carrier or Other Means, Samples, Complimentary, and Other Free Copies	207	240
E. Total Distribution	16,170	19,263
F. Copies Not Distributed.		
1. Office Use, Left Over, Unaccounted, Spoiled After Printing	1,730	1,337
2. Returns From News Agents	750	0-
G. Total (Sum of E, F1 and F2)	18,650	20,600
11. I certify that the statements made by me above are correct and complete.

RICHARD JOHN NEUHAUS
Editor-in-Chief

this stance, I fail to see it.

Furthermore, we do not see how the cited divisions give license—and this seems the only logical inference from Neuhaus' apparent indignation at the Orthodox Church's "agitation" and his confused contrast of it with internal ecclesial disharmony—for the "missionary incursions" that he so lightly dismisses. Perhaps he would do well to look seriously into some of the atrocities being committed in Eastern regions on the behalf of his own (Roman Catholic) denomination. This might serve as the remedy for his unbecomingly frivolity concerning the matter, as well as providing his readers with something a bit more intellectually substantial than an introduction to ecclesiastical intrigues attendant on the downfall of Communism. . . .

Br. James Miller

St. Herman's Orthodox Monastery
Platina, CA

Church and State, Then and Now

I trust that when Augustine Thompson ("The Pope, the Emperor, and the First Amendment," August/September) teaches his students about the Investiture conflict he does not deal with it simply in terms of "state control of religion" versus "free ecclesiastical administration." An eleventh-century bishop was a great deal more than a mere "ecclesiastical administrator": he was a prince, and had at his disposal lands, revenues, and armies. Henry IV certainly had a legitimate interest in ensuring the loyalty of these men to his rule.

The real tragedy of the conflict is that it was not effectively resolved: the entanglement of church and state persisted until Reformation times and beyond, and always to the disadvantage of the church.

Paul C. Fox
Farmington, PA

A Change of Heart?

Two years ago in Dijon a friend arranged a lunch with Rémi Brague, at the time his colleague. Brague was among the younger scholars from whom the Catholic Church expected

help to reverse the devastating anti-Catholic and desacralizing trends. A little later Brague moved to Paris, a proof of his merits and a sign that he was appreciated in high places, both secular and ecclesiastic.

The more reason, then, why I was astonished to read his article, "Christ, Culture & the New Europe" (August/September). Brague hardly pursues a coherent line of argumentation; the text is wavering, uncertain, trying to please various contradictory sides. His deprecating words about the Church's "reconquista" (an ironic term, a bit hostile) sound like those of critics of "triumphalism" two decades ago.

Question: should the Church or shouldn't it gain ground, culturally too—or does Rémi Brague prefer a syncretistic form of "humanism"? Would it be detrimental for our culture if sacred inspiration were manifest again in architecture, music, literature, and the fine arts? Or is it better to be condemned to a lifelong viewing of Andres Serrano's "Piss Christ" and to hearing hard rock?

The same issue of FIRST THINGS contains reviews of books suggesting that Christianity should be erased or reabsorbed in earlier forms. Rémi Brague seems to encourage such a course. Is this how he acquired points that took him from Dijon to Paris?

Thomas Molnar
Ridgewood, NJ

Rémi Brague replies:

Prof. Molnar's last and most important question is libelous and mirrors a paranoid cast of mind. I moved from Dijon to my present position in Paris, where I teach Medieval Arabic Philosophy, because I can read Hebrew and Arabic. In France, the Churches and the State are completely independent of each other and all the universities are State institutions.

Answers to the other questions: Yes. No. No. No. But they betray Professor Molnar's own obsessions, not a careful reading of my article.

I apologize for what remains unclear in the latter. For a fuller and clearer version, see my small book on European culture: *Europe, la voie romaine*.

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Opinion

On Marrying, Again

Kari Jenson Gold

Several years ago I wrote an essay on marriage, an essay filled with conviction and certainty. I was twenty-two, three weeks into my own marriage, and an out-of-work actress working as a receptionist for IBM. Not exactly Montaigne. Through a series of unlikely events, the essay was published and reprinted in a literary review, a psychoanalytic newsletter, an ethics textbook, and in pamphlet form for use by Episcopalian study groups.

Three years ago I divorced and have since remarried. It has seemed painfully ironic and, of course, somehow appropriate that the subject about which I wrote with such great confidence should have been the occasion of my greatest failure. I still believe what I wrote then, but it is obvious that in some respects my understanding fell short.

I wrote then in angry defense of marriage at a time when such a step was not only unfashionable but even a sort of betrayal of that "independent, career-minded young woman" ideal so lauded by all. My argument then would, for the most part, still be my argument now: after all, my own failure to keep the marriage promise says nothing about the truth of the argument. My failure does, however, radically alter my perspective, destroy the confidence I once had in my own ability to prevail, and demand that I look again at the question of marriage—this time from the vantage of divorce.

Certainly, I would no longer (if I ever did) claim that divorce is always a mistake. Always a failure, always an evil, but not always mistaken. Even as a child I remember seeing the movie of *Dr. Zhivago* and asking my parents whether divorce was ever O.K. Surely, I thought, Lara and Dr. Zhivago belonged together. And I often wonder whether Anna Karenina would have had to kill herself if she'd only found a better man than Vronsky. In any event, I am convinced that there are times when the marriage vows must be broken.

The problem, then, is to understand the broken promise in such a way as to make possible future unbroken promises. I had argued that the *public* promise to love is itself the enabling, if not guarantee, of a lasting love: That "piece of paper," which my friends had found confining or even irrelevant, in fact frees us from the dark, always vulnerable world of private thought into the bright and clarity-

filled world of action. Saved from a slavish dependence on our "feelings," which are all too murky and easily swayed, we are able to hope for, work at, a "love till death do us part." Or so I, impassioned with all the insight of a twenty-two year old, declared.

What I underestimated then and what has only increased with the years is the almost complete erosion of the public arena. It is this failure of the public realm that has made a lasting marriage as unlikely an event as a redemptive divorce.

A promise is an action and therefore an essentially public undertaking. But this "public" presupposes laws, commandments, standards, restrictions. Absent all these, we are acting, yes, but in a world no less murky than our own private interior. Thus we may indeed promise—may take the initial enabling step of marriage—only to find ourselves plunged back into darkness.

We live in a public arena in which there are no absolutes, and in which all rules and restrictions are suspect. Those institutions that have traditionally aided and encouraged marriage now function as collaborators, even co-conspirators, in the broken promise. No-fault divorce is readily available, prenuptial agreements anticipating divorce are all the rage, and our churches are far more interested in the fate of the rain forest than in the endangered promises of those in their congregations. Indeed, I cannot recall the last time I heard the "M" word or the "S" (spouse) word. Parishioners must count themselves fortunate now even to hear discussion of "relationships" or "partners."

Entire industries exist specifically for the purpose of easing guilt, of making us "feel O.K. about ourselves." Our culture has appropriated the language of Christianity without any of its substance. Thus we forgive without ever having judged. Indeed, we are "saved" without ever having sinned. What we seem now to call forgiveness (as in therapy's famous "learning to forgive oneself") seems rather to take away the seriousness of the offense than to encourage acknowledgement of failure that could lead to repentance, and a resolution to do better. Only in a culture therapeutically obsessed, in which the self is perceived objectively, not subjectively—as something apart from what we do or are—could we speak of "forgiving oneself." Forgiveness is an action requiring *both* object and subject. Forgiveness is also a gift—by definition, unearned. If I cannot earn or work for forgiveness, I most assuredly cannot forgive myself. I may learn to live with my past, may understand it more fully, but I cannot forgive myself. Only God and those who love us can, through the gift of forgiveness, redeem the past, and make whole again.

Which brings me back to the initial point. Unless there is judgment, there is no need for forgiveness

and thus no possibility of starting anew. For a culture in which acceptance and tolerance are the chief virtues (indeed intolerantly demanded) and “judgmental” is a dirty word, there can be no true second chance, no real hope.

When we take away all disapproval, all censure, all the everyday constraints that make divorce more difficult, the inevitable result is the diminishment of marriage. We cannot expect to take all the weight and meaning out of divorce if we want any weight and meaning left in marriage. I remember after my own divorce, when friends asked how I was, I sometimes replied that I’d lost my honor. Almost no one knew what I meant, and certainly no one agreed with me. Everyone was far too busy “being supportive.” Let me add that I am in no way blaming the public for my own mistakes. My marriage had to end in spite of my own strongly held convictions, and no amount of pressure from the outside could have saved it. So would I really have wanted hordes of wrathful friends and relatives, difficult laws, and harsh preachers? No, of course not. But such a response might, in fact, have been more appropriate to the gravity of the event. We do ourselves and our friends no real service by making nice and making light of something as serious as divorce and marriage. Not if we hope for a better and more faithful future.

On the other hand, it may well be that marriage “till death us do part” is simply a doomed enterprise. In a world so ruled by the jargon of therapy there is little room for a permanent relationship. In this ever-optimistic world there are no external absolutes, no original sin, only the relentless pursuit of “health” and “fulfillment.” If what we all aspire to is health rather than virtue, gratification rather than strength of character, how can we hope to find a foundation for a lasting commitment? If I have “grown” and my mate hasn’t kept up, is even impeding my own “growth,” what possible reason could I have for remaining faithful? The “healthy” choice is clear: find someone better-suited to my current needs. The notion that a man and woman should be devoted each to the other “through sickness and health,” should place their good as a couple over the good of each individual, is then just silly.

I have no doubt that there are times when therapy can be of tremendous value. My concern is that it is largely practiced in a moral vacuum. Only if the patient has a firm morality, or at least aspires to one, is there likely to be any discussion of right and wrong, because therapy’s only imperative is the health of the patient. An open-ended quest for fulfillment unbounded by religion or morality is a fruitless and ultimately dangerous endeavor.

Let us suppose that a lasting marriage in a world such as ours is no longer a reasonable expectation. What does it matter? What difference does it make

to anyone but the couple? The answer is stunningly simple but it bears repeating. It makes a big difference to the children. While there are any number of alternatives to the nuclear family, all the evidence suggests that nothing else works so well. Children need a father and a mother, male and female. And they need the stability of one set of rules, not two—so it seems eminently more desirable that the parents live together, love one another, and work things out as a family. Hardly foolproof, but surely more likely to produce happy, productive children than any other arrangement.

Without children, we have no society. Marriage, then, is the foundation of community, the model for our communal life. Without that first promise, there can be no other. When we abuse the marriage vows, we imperil our community. Because the promise of marriage is a public promise it is made not only to one’s spouse, but also to one’s community. The breaking of such a promise breaks more than a marriage. There may be times when such violence is unavoidable, but as with other crimes against society, there must be judgment, repentance, and, one hopes, forgiveness.

Perhaps marriage is doomed, practicable only for a few hardy souls whose great good fortune has made it a possibility. I do not know. The sort of confidence I once had in myself has long since vanished, and the trust I placed in our public institutions erodes with each passing day. In my new marriage, I have been granted a second chance for which I am most grateful, and I pray that God will help us remain faithful. But while my heart has never been so full, my mind is inescapably aware of my own fragility and that of the world in which I live. These are dangerous times, actively hostile to marriage, family, and community. We must keep our promises and pray for grace.

KARI JENSON GOLD, *who is married to writer Lucky Gold, is still an actress.*

The Priests of Culture

Peter J. Leithart

The New Testament’s epistle to the Hebrews was written to Jewish converts in the early Church who had shrunk back from their Christian confession when faced with persecution. To encourage them to persevere in the new covenant in Christ, the writer shows how the details of the Old Tes-

tament tabernacle, sacrifices, and priesthood pointed forward to and are superseded by the work of Messiah Jesus. In turning from Jesus, the recipients of the letter were turning from better promises, a better sacrifice, a better priesthood, a better covenant.

An obvious question for a devout Jew was how Jesus, a descendant of Judah, could claim the high priesthood, an office reserved to members of the tribe of Levi. In responding to this question, the writer of the epistle argues that Jesus is a lawful high priest because He belongs to an older and more permanent order of priesthood than that of Levi, the order of Melchizedek. Through Abraham, Levi himself acknowledged the superiority of Melchizedek's priesthood (Heb. 7:9-10). Since there has been a change in the priestly order, there has been a change in the regulations for priestly service. The genealogically qualified Levitical priests have been replaced by a priest who is qualified by "the power of an indestructible life" (7:16). A change in priesthood, the writer tells us, is accompanied by a corresponding change in law (7:12).

This maxim summarizes a recurring pattern in the history recorded in the Old Testament. Prior to the Exodus, the priesthood of Yahweh was evidently not limited to descendants of Abraham (Gen. 14). Israel was redeemed from Egypt to be a "royal priesthood" (Ex. 19:6), and the tribe of Levi was specially elected to serve at the Lord's house. Not incidentally, detailed ritual, moral, and social regulations were revealed at the time of this "change in priesthood." Similarly, the prophet Samuel both prepared the way for a reordering of the priesthood and promulgated laws and ordinances for the kingdom of Israel (1 Sam. 10:25). David not only consolidated the kingdom of Israel, but also reorganized the Levitical priests (1 Chron. 23-26). Everywhere in the Bible, a change in the priesthood is accompanied by changes in the ordering of cult and culture.

Though the author of Hebrews evidently had this redemptive-historical pattern in mind, his dictum can also be applied to the sociological phenomenon known as the "circulation of elites." Elites, particularly intellectual elites whose specialty is the manipulation of symbols, are "priesthoods" in a broad sense. Social change (changes in law) always occur hand in hand with the reshuffling of such elites.

This point becomes dramatically clear in the theory of culture formulated by Philip Rieff in an essay entitled "The Impossible Culture: Wilde as Modern Prophet." In Rieff's reading, Oscar Wilde envisioned a culture in which individuals would be freed from all inhibition and all authority. Every possibility would remain an open possibility. Against Wilde's idea of the "primacy of possibility," Rieff insists that authoritative limits are of the

essence of culture; culture requires "the primacy of interdiction." In another essay, Rieff defines culture as a "common symbolic," a "pattern of moral demands, a range of standard self-expectations about what we may and may not do, in the face of infinite possibilities." This common symbolic is an expression of what is sacred to the members of the culture.

Every culture faces the threat of "sheer possibility," the threat that its members will agree with the Grand Inquisitor's suggestion that all is permitted. Cultures survive, Rieff argues, "only so far as the members of the culture learn, through their membership, how to narrow the range of choices otherwise open." "Safely inside their culture—more precisely, the culture safely inside them—members of it are disposed to enact only certain possibilities of behavior while refusing even to dream of others." Thus, "members of the same culture can expect each other to behave in certain ways and not in others." Culture and character are, in short, founded on prohibition.

Cultures are based on interdictions, but also require remissions from those interdictions. Interdicts authoritatively say "No" to certain thoughts, feelings, and behaviors; remissions provide for the exceptional "Yes" that, as Rieff puts it in *The Triumph of the Therapeutic*, provides relief from the "strain of conforming to the controlling symbolic." When a person violates an interdict without a justifiable remission, he commits a transgression of the moral demand system. Culture is thus a dialectical unity of interdictions and remissions. Deep cultural changes occur when there are changes in the moral demand system. What was interdicted may become permissible, but the new "permissiveness" will generate interdicts of its own. Political revolutions are little more than glorified palace coups. Real revolutions are changes in patterns of moral demands. That is, cultural change means a change in "law."

The writer to the Hebrews would have us know that changes in law follow upon changes in priesthood, and Rieff's cultural theory suggests a similar pattern. The interdictory-remissive complex is internalized, Rieff claims, under the direction of authoritative cultural guides or priesthoods: "Priesthoods preside over the origins of a culture and guard its character." Priests form and guard culture by projecting an ideal pattern of conduct that narrows the range of possible choices; priests teach what may and what may not be done, the interdicts and the remissions. Education is thus the inculcation by a priesthood of a culture's "Thou shalt nots."

A cultural revolution, then, not only involves a change in the symbolic of moral demands, but a change in priesthood: "A crisis in culture occurred

whenever old guides were struck dumb, or whenever laities began listening to new guides." For many centuries, Rieff notes, the sociological priesthood of Western culture was the literal priesthood of the Christian Church, but by Wilde's time churchmen had defaulted in their capacity as authoritative cultural guides. They had fallen silent, and other priesthoods began projecting their ideals onto the "laity." The "post-Christian" West can, from this perspective, be seen as the product of the revolutionary changes in law that followed from a revolutionary change of priesthood.

In Rieff's view, no successor priesthood has yet emerged, but the culture has instead embarked on the unprecedented experiment of forming a non-moral culture, a "culture" lacking both religiously grounded interdicts and a priesthood to serve as the guardian of sacred boundaries. Such is, in fact, an experiment in "anticulture." What is most

disturbing, however, is that the Church no longer functions as priesthood in this sociological sense even for Christians. Rieff has called attention to contemporary churchmen's penchant for abandoning all Christian dogma and practice that does not readily lend itself to therapeutic purposes. The "anticulture" has invaded the Church.

Jesus said that His disciples would be the light of the world, implying that dark ages come when the Church hides its light under a bushel. Christians, therefore, can hardly expect the rebirth of culture in the world without a rebirth of culture in the Church. One is led to echo, in a perhaps more literal sense than originally intended, Alasdair MacIntyre's suggestion that our culture awaits the appearance of a new, very different St. Benedict.

PETER J. LEITHART is a regular contributor to FIRST THINGS.

Of All Saints, and One

Dancing, in mind at least, toward a stage of untested embrace —
 Virginal spirits grasped in the shared, unexpected spectacle
 Of one season's end, and another's hesitant birth.
 The familiar overture of early winter, glimpsed for a moment
 By eyes that found delight in a scene of colliding awe,
 Of wonder wrapped at the heart of such commonness.
 A place and time of grace, if in its ordinary face;
 Should we await another? A radiant scene,
 Freighted with patient miracles; obscured
 Only for those without eyes to see:
 A stubborn season's embrace of its own natured demise.
 Shadows pressing ahead of hastening night,
 Bearers of brittle silences, descending
 With neither courtesy nor contempt upon grasses and fields
 Below, announcing the end of this reluctant vision.
 Yet greet it we must with comprehending defiance,
 Without the residue of resentment toward what must and will be.
 Birth, on winter's other side, must yield to ordinary death
 Before rising into dancing convergence,
 When again the last will be first, and the silenced speak.

Mark S. Burrows

Tradition and Creativity in Culture and Law

Mary Ann Glendon

A well-known account of creativity sets the scene for a celebrated act of creation, and a bleak scene it was: "In the beginning . . . the earth was without form and void, and darkness covered the face of the abyss." On that occasion, creativity consisted in bringing something out of nothing—a feat so remarkable that the Hebrew verb used to describe it (*barah*) refers exclusively to divine activity. In the English language, the words "create" and "creative" long had a similar connotation. It was not until the Renaissance that they began to be used in the way that we now take for granted, referring to the work of human minds or hands. That change in linguistic usage was just one sign of a new way of thinking about the place of man in the universe. And central to that new worldview was an exhilarating vision of human potency—a vision that we English speakers associate with Shakespeare's ode to humanity in *Hamlet*: "How noble in reason! How infinite in faculty! In form and movement how express and admirable! In action how like an angel! In apprehension how like a God!"

With that heady estimation of human capacities came a certain sense of liberation from tradition, custom, and the group. Still, it was not until the Romantic era that creativity came to be identified

in many quarters with individual originality, and later yet that disdain for tradition became a tradition in itself. At the extreme, in our time, the tradition of antitraditionalism would have it that *homo sapiens sapiens* can cancel its debts to the past, and that we too can bring wonders out of the void.

The idea that tradition is antithetical to creativity of the human sort is what I propose to examine and challenge—along with its usual underlying assumptions that tradition is necessarily static, and that the essence of creativity is originality. To anyone with a scientific bent, my project will seem to be an exercise in the obvious. For in the history of science, as Stephen Toulmin, Thomas Kuhn, and others have made clear, nearly every great advance has been made by persons (typically, groups of persons) who simultaneously possess two qualities: a thorough grounding in the normal science of their times, and the boldness to make a break with the reigning paradigm within which that normal science takes place. My concern, however, is the progress of antitraditionalism in the human sciences, where what counts as an advance, or creativity, is more contestable, and where many eminent thinkers now devote much of their energy to attacking the traditions that have nourished their various disciplines. Several of these literary legionnaires have crossed academic boundaries to join forces in a kind of holy war against "western civilization."

I shall confine my attention here to the field with which I am most familiar, namely the law—though this may vex the spirit of Erasmus, who seems to have had a rather low opinion of lawyers, calling them "among the silliest and most ignorant of

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men." Erasmus might have been amazed, however, if he could have known the degree to which lawyers themselves, and especially teachers of lawyers, would one day come to exhibit disdain for their own craft, and to disavow openly the ideals of their traditions. I say traditions, for, where Americans are concerned, there are three of them involved: the common law tradition that we inherited from England, the tradition of American constitutionalism, and the craft tradition of the profession.

The chief philosopher of the Critical Legal Studies movement, Roberto Unger, came uncomfortably close to the mark in his well-known description of the legal world he entered in the late 1960s. Most professors then, he wrote, "dallied in one more variant of the perennial effort to restate power and preconception as right. In and outside the law schools, most jurists looked with indifference or even disdain upon the legal theorists. . . . When we came, they were like a priesthood that had lost their faith and kept their jobs. They stood in tedious embarrassment before cold altars." To the extent that Unger's portrait captures something of the current self-understanding of lawyers, it points to a state of affairs that cannot help but have implications for our law-saturated society. Thus it seems worthwhile to inquire into the extent, causes, and consequences of a widespread loss of confidence among lawyers themselves concerning legal traditions that have been intimately bound up with our historic experiment in ordered liberty.

The legal tradition we inherited from England is almost a textbook example of what Alasdair MacIntyre has called a living tradition, one that is "historically extended" and "socially embodied," whose development constantly points beyond itself.

In taking up the tradition of the common law, we are faced first with a matter of terminology. The term "common law" refers to the type of law, and lawmaking, that historically distinguished the English legal system from the legal systems of continental Europe. The common law is an evolving body of principles built by accretion from countless decisions in individual lawsuits. Because it emerges from practice rather than theory, its principles are highly fact-sensitive, and not too general. Continental law, by contrast, had, as they say, the smell of the lamp—it was developed by scholars, and was further rationalized and systematized by comprehensive legislative codifications.

What need to be emphasized here are two remarkable features of the common law tradition. First, its continuity. Over centuries that saw the rise and fall of feudalism, the expansion of commerce, and the transition to constitutional monarchy, the common law of England adapted to each new circumstance without abrupt change or any root-and-branch reorganization of the sort represented

by the European codifications. Statutes in England, for the most part, were like patches here and there against the background of the common law, and judges tried to construe them so as to blend them, as far as possible, into the fabric of the case law. Thus in 1894 the great English legal historian F. W. Maitland could look back on centuries of legal evolution and say: "When we speak of a body of law, we use a metaphor so apt that it is hardly a metaphor. We picture to ourselves a being that lives and grows, that preserves its identity while every atom of which it is composed is subject to a ceaseless process of change, decay, and renewal." Lest the reader surmise that that sort of thinking was confined to armchair types, or to the other side of the Atlantic, consider that at just about the same time in Boston, a judge named Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr. was likening the law to a "magic mirror" in which a suitably trained observer could see a "mighty princess" eternally weaving into her tapestry "dim figures of the ever-lengthening past."

The second feature of the common law that must be stressed is the distinctive methodology that enabled it to adapt and grow while maintaining its continuity. To try to describe that method is a bit like trying to describe swimming or bicycle riding, for it consists of a set of habits and practices that are only acquired by doing. But the conventional understanding goes something like this: the common law judge is supposed to be a virtuoso of practical reason, weaving back and forth between facts and law, striving not only for a fair disposition of the dispute at hand, but to decide each case with reference to a principle that transcends the facts of that case, all with a view toward maintaining continuity with past decisions, deciding like cases alike, and providing guidance for parties similarly situated in the future. It was those sorts of operations that Lord Coke had in mind in the seventeenth century when he famously said: "Reason is the life of the law; nay, the common law itself is nothing else but reason." To Coke, "reason" did not mean deductive reason (as it did for Descartes), nor self-interested calculation (as it did for Hobbes). It was, rather, an extended process of collaboration over time. Or, as he put it himself, it was a kind of group achievement, "gotten by long study, observation, and experience, . . . fined and refined over centuries by generations of grave and learned men. . . ."

To be a traditionalist in such a tradition seems pretty clearly not to be frozen in the past or mired in the status quo, but rather to participate, as MacIntyre puts it, in a community of intense discourse about what it is that gives the tradition in question its point and purpose.

It is a fair question whether one can really speak of creativity, as distinct from mere inventiveness or successful problem-solving, in the common law

tradition. On this point, I would like to suggest that the American Founding was a classic instance of the kind of creativity that emerges from, and is deeply rooted in, the very tradition that it irrevocably transforms. The Declaration of Independence, the Constitution, the Federalist Papers, and the landmark early decisions of the Supreme Court could only have been produced by statesmen who were steeped in the English legal heritage. True, the Founders varied considerably in the degree of regard they had for that tradition. But all of them fully understood the role the common law had played in safeguarding the lives, liberties, and property of Englishmen through civil war and social upheaval. When the American colonists came into conflict with their royal governors, they claimed that same common law as their birthright. They broke with the mother country, but they did not reject their own past. Rather, their English legal inheritance was taken up, transformed, and made into the basis of a new order.

Another type of legal creativity—the everyday creativity of judges and lawyers—is of a more modest sort, but should not be underrated. It is the creativity of the artisan rather than the architect, but the same observation holds regarding the importance of being grounded in tradition for any significant advance. Think of the preventive law handed down through generations of practitioners—the well-wrought agreements, bylaws, contracts, deeds, leases, wills, and trusts that at their best aid human beings to carry on mutually beneficial relations with a minimum of friction, to make reliable plans for the future, and to avoid unnecessary disputes by anticipating and providing for contingencies. What lawyer could responsibly draw up such a document without consulting the experience of bench and bar embodied in the humble formbook? And when preventive law fails, creativity of a modest sort is involved in dispute settlement as well.

At this point, an inquisitive person might ask why, if the common law tradition had such a robust capacity for creative development, it has fallen into disrepute among many of its inheritors.

It seems relevant, to begin with, that the tradition is one whose participants were never much given to introspection. Legal knowledge for most of our history was, after all, passed on through apprenticeship. And because its methodology was latent, our continental friends, with their strong suit in theorizing, often assumed that we had none. Erasmus was characteristically blunt on this subject: “The study of English law,” he said, “is as far as can be from true learning.” And, in a similar vein, Tocqueville, on his visit to the United States in 1831, remarked on how “strange” it was that such a legalistic society had not yet produced “any great writers inquiring into the general principles of the laws.”

A mere decade after Tocqueville penned those words, however, the man who was to bring fancy theory to American law was born in Boston, Massachusetts. And as fate would have it, he devoted much of his prodigious talent to debunking the roles of tradition and reason in the law. It would be hard to exaggerate the impact of Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr. on American legal culture. His life was literally the stuff of which legends are made. He was the gifted son of a famous father, and a genuine Civil War hero, wounded at Ball’s Bluff, Antietam, and Fredericksburg. By the time of his death in 1935, at age 93, he had distinguished himself in every role the legal profession had to offer. As a young practitioner in a busy Boston firm, he spent his evenings writing a treatise on the common law that revolutionized the way American lawyers write and speak about law. He then taught briefly at Harvard Law School before his appointment to the Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court in 1882. After twenty years on that bench (three of them as Chief Justice), he was named, at the age of 61, to the United States Supreme Court, where he served for another 29 years. He left his stamp on nearly every area of law—as much through his fluent literary style as through his innovative theories or his decisions and dissents in landmark cases. Where legal theory is concerned, Holmes’ writings set the scholarly agenda for the entire twentieth century: legal realism, pragmatism, sociological jurisprudence, law and economics, and critical legal studies are all little more than elaborations of themes announced by Holmes. As a leading Legal Realist wrote in the 1930s, “Holmes was the daddy of us all.”

This “daddy,” though, may have inadvertently hindered his progeny from building on his own achievements. Consider how he taught them to view tradition. Wherever one looks in the law, Holmes complained (in 1897, in what is still the most widely quoted law review article ever published), one sees “tradition” getting in the way of “rational policy.” But the “tradition” against which he railed was just the dead hand of the past, as witness another well-known statement: “It is revolting to have no better reason for a rule of law than that it was laid down in the time of Henry IV.”

This reductionist assault on tradition was combined with an attack on traditional legal reasoning. The opening sentence of his 1891 treatise, *The Common Law*, was a thinly veiled challenge to Lord Coke’s dictum that “Reason is the life of the law.” Holmes wrote: “The life of the law has not been logic: it has been experience.” Now, one interesting fact about that famous aphorism is that even at the height of nineteenth-century legal formalism, American lawyers were not making such an extreme claim as that the life of the law was logic. As for Coke, he would have agreed wholeheartedly with

Holmes on the priority of experience over logic. A second interesting fact about Holmes' formulation is that it closely resembles a statement in a German legal treatise that we now know Holmes checked out of a Boston library in 1879. I mention this not to impugn Holmes' originality but to call attention to a point that is more important: the criticism in question was directed by its German author at the rigid conceptualism of scholars who *did* believe that logic was the life of the law. The German academics who were then engaged in drafting the German Civil Code of 1896 envisioned that code as ideally possessing "logical closedness" (*logische Geschlossenheit*). It was highly inappropriate for Holmes to apply the same criticism to Coke, or even to more formalistic nineteenth-century writers on the judge-made, open-textured, common law.

But Holmes was a man on the move. With the same fast shuffle that he used to convert "tradition" into fossilized "history," he reduced "reason" to dry "logic"—a collection, as he put it, of syllogisms, axioms, and deductions. That, as they say, took the whiskey out of the highball. And there was more. For Holmes announced, as though it were a discovery, what lawyers have always known: that there are many times when the law is silent, obscure, or incomplete, and that judges often do not simply find and apply the law, but actually exercise a limited lawmaking function. In a passage meant to shock, Holmes offered his theory of what judges were making law from. Expediency, opinion, and even prejudice, he said, had all played a greater role "than the syllogism" in fashioning the rules by which we are governed. One might think that it would not take a Sherlock (or an Oliver Wendell) Holmes to discern that judges, being human, display the usual human flaws in the exercise of their rational faculties.

But Holmes pressed the point further. Revisiting the subject at the height of the blunt macho style that was his trademark, Holmes told a group of law students: "You will find some text writers telling you that [law] . . . is a system of reason." That, according to the great man, was obfuscation. Laws were nothing more or less than "commands" backed up by the armed might of the state. The aim of legal study was simply the science of prediction, prediction of "where the axe will fall." And in words that are still engraved on the mind of every law student, he said that if you want to know the law, "you must look at it as a bad man does." He exhorted his youthful audience to use "cynical acid" to wash away all the moralizing language of right and wrong so that they could see the law as it truly is. But don't think I mean any disrespect for the law, he hastened to add, "I *venerate* the law." Why such piety toward mere command? Because "it has

the final title to respect that it exists."

In the same speech, later published under the title *The Path of the Law*, Holmes said that his "ideal" was to put the law on a more modern and scientific basis through clear thinking about means and ends, costs and benefits. "Reason" might be out, but what Holmes approvingly called "rationality" was in. Accordingly, in a passage that has become sacred scripture in some quarters, he advised that every lawyer should acquire a knowledge of economics, for the "man of the future is the man of statistics and the master of economics."

By thus cabinning tradition and reason, Holmes helped to prepare the way for the carnival of twentieth-century American legal theory. For many of his successors, tradition took on a pejorative sense—it became the debris of old errors, power relations, and prejudices. His critique of reason laid the foundation for the fact-skeptics and the rule-skeptics of the 1930s, who called themselves Realists, and for their successors, the critical theorists who came on the scene in the 1960s.

With hindsight, though, it is remarkable how deeply Holmes himself drew from the springs of the very tradition he was engaged in disparaging. In this respect, he bears a striking resemblance to those of his contemporaries whom Hilton Kramer calls the great "tradition-haunted" artists—Picasso and Matisse, Eliot and Yeats, Schoenberg and Stravinsky. With his vision of the "mighty princess," with his mastery of his craft, and with his vaulting ambition, Holmes was a Picasso-like figure—larger than life, boldly iconoclastic, yet mindful of his lineage and of the continuity of culture. *The Path of the Law* was his *Demoiselles of Avignon*.

Now what is very important to acknowledge at this point is that Holmes was far ahead of most of his contemporaries in his perception that the common law tradition was in a period of crisis. And he was right on the mark in his understanding of the way in which the American constitutional tradition represented an important break, as well as continuity, with the common law tradition. To borrow Thomas Kuhn's terminology again, trouble spots had appeared in the reigning paradigm, and the normal legal science of the turn of the century was not handling them well.

What was the nature of the crisis? The Anglo-American legal system, not for the first time in its long history, was confronted with major social, economic, and political changes, but this time they were occurring with unprecedented rapidity. I will mention just three major sources of difficulty.

Consider first that when Holmes was a young lawyer in the 1870s, legislatures had begun producing a new type of statute—primitive regulatory legislation, much of it addressed to conditions in

factories. Those whose interests were adversely affected by these laws took their complaints to the courts, with the result that the Supreme Court embarked on its first sustained adventure with the power of judicial review, a power that it had possessed for nearly a century, but which it had exercised sparingly. The behavior of the Supreme Court and other courts in that period (striking down much early social legislation as infringing on economic rights) is now frequently treated in law school classes as showing that the judiciary was in the service of the dominant classes. But there was another dimension to the story. When late-nineteenth-century judges entered the still relatively uncharted areas of statutory interpretation and constitutional review, they really did not know quite how to handle the new situation. It is helpful to keep in mind that as late as 1875, nearly half of the United States Supreme Court's case load was still pure common law litigation. By 1925, however, statutes figured importantly in all but about 5 percent of the cases. Most judges during those years of transition tended to proceed in the way they knew best—by falling back on their habitual practice of construing enacted law (including the Constitution) in such a way as to blend in with, rather than displace, the common law background where, as it happened, freedom of contract was ensconced as a leading principle. In a series of famous dissents, Holmes, to his credit, tried to point out to his fellow judges that the rules of the game had changed in 1787. But that point seldom got across until the 1930s, and even then it was not fully absorbed.

A second source of strain on customary ways of doing things, down in the capillaries of the legal system, was the rapid development of industry and commerce. Pre-industrial property, tort, and contract principles were often poorly suited to the new problems generated by urbanization, industrialization, and the rise of the large business corporation.

Third, by the end of Holmes' long life in the 1930s, the American experiment had moved into yet another new phase as the federal government vastly expanded its activities through legislation which the Court, in a stunning about-face, upheld against constitutional attack. Among the New Deal lawyers who had broken ground by producing the Social Security Act, the securities laws, and the national labor relations legislation, there were some eminent academics. They called attention to an urgent problem: the need to begin the study of legislative drafting and interpretation in the nation's law schools. Remarkably, however, to this day that call has gone largely unheeded.

In sum, it seems fair to say that the stresses and strains on the legal system that appeared during Holmes' lifetime called for a high degree of juristic skill, imagination, and creativity. How did the legal profession respond?

To begin with the obvious, lawsuits have to be decided. Judges on the front lines cannot decline to render a decision just because the problems brought to them are new and the law is unclear. So judges in state courts duly began to try to adapt the principles of pre-industrial personal injury law, face-to-face sales law, and agrarian land law to the circumstances of an industrialized and urbanized society. Often expressing their impatience with the failure of legislatures to resolve the larger policy conflicts implicit in that enterprise, some of these judges moved boldly and openly into rule-making and policy-making. The purported discovery that judges had always engaged in "creative" activity was taken by some as legitimating a more ambitious concept of the judicial role, and by a few as a sign that all bets were off. Contrary to what many people believe, the Warren Court of the 1950s did not initiate, but simply took to new heights, this movement by judges into areas where their legitimacy is weakest—finding broad social and economic facts (as opposed to the facts in the case before them) and adjudicating between conflicting and competing interests in society (as opposed to resolving the particular dispute at hand).

What about the call of scholarly New Dealers like James M. Landis and Felix Frankfurter for more attention to the study of legislation? Non-lawyers may be surprised to learn that, even now, American law schools devote practically no systematic attention to the drafting or interpretation of statutes, and very little to empirical study of how various regulatory arrangements work out in practice. In the spring of 1992, a committee appointed to review the curriculum at Harvard Law School reported that Harvard (like most other law schools) was still teaching the basic required first-year program "almost without regard to the coming of the regulatory state, and without recognition that statutes and regulations have become the predominant legal sources of our time."

An interested citizen, learning of this state of affairs, might be forgiven for wondering what American law schools *have* been doing all this time. Part of the answer is that prosaic regulatory law never really had a chance once constitutional law became the "glamor subject" of legal education in the 1950s and 1960s. The constitutional law that took center stage, moreover, sloughed off its old preoccupations with federalism and the separation of powers to concentrate its main attention on the court-centered jurisprudence of the rights revolution. The old, instinctive preference for judge-made over enacted law that had shaped constitutional interpretation at the turn of the century enjoyed an Indian summer among majorities on the Warren and Burger Courts as they embarked on this second exciting adventure with judicial review. And that same preference persists today among many law

professors who teach that the Constitution is just a “text” whose various provisions are mere starting points for freewheeling judicial development—as if the people of the United States had not established a regime that places important limits on both judicial and legislative lawmaking.

Meanwhile, a new generation of tradition- and reason-bashers appeared in the legal academy. The law-and-economics school took up Holmes’ “ideal” of instrumental rationality, while the critical theorists gave his skepticism a new post-modern twist with the aid of French literary criticism and neo-Marxist social thought. It is a big step, for example, from observing that there are certain leeways inherent in fact-finding and rule-application, to asserting that there is no such thing as a fact and that all rules are radically indeterminate and manipulable. It is another major leap from being realistic about the difficulties of disinterested decision-making to a condemnation of the entire legal system as fatally tainted with racism, sexism, and other forms of hegemony. And there is a world of difference between the lawyerly reformism of the New Dealers and the view that law is nothing more than concentrated politics—between, you might say, Felix Frankfurter and the Frankfurt School.

Noticeably less interested than Holmes and the Realists in law as such, the “crits” have borrowed the main elements of their critical theory from France, Italy, and Germany—countries that had never had experience with anything like the common law, where reason too often meant *raison d’ état*, and which historically have had difficulty establishing regimes in which the rule of law is respected. But many of the critical scholars had absorbed so little “normal science” that they could not see the problems in transferring a critique of continental law to their own system. In the dark, all law looks the same.

The work of many of these legal avant-gardists thus reminds one of Marx’s dictum that history repeats itself, first as tragedy, then as farce. They have added only marginally to the critical insights of their “tradition-haunted” predecessors, for their wholesale rejection of the past has left them with a rather flimsy conceptual apparatus. By opting out of the ongoing argument embodied in living legal traditions, they are left to commune disjointedly with one another or with themselves. Many of them, like their counterparts in the art world, are attracted by violence and destruction. One legal Dadaist, for example, has written exuberantly in the *Yale Law Journal* that “trashing is fun.” “Context-smashing” is central to the program advocated by Unger, who criticizes “eighteenth-century constitutionalism” for the drag that its checks and balances impose on the pace of social change. He envisions future governments with “ministries of destabilization” to

promote ferment and creative disarray.

After suggesting a comparison between avant-gardism in the law and in the arts, I must admit that I am more uneasy about the cultural effects of this phenomenon in law than in, say, painting. I also believe that, unfortunately for us Americans, bashing legal traditions is a graver matter for our society than it is for the continental countries from which American critical legal theorists have drawn their inspiration. More homogeneous nations have many sources of social cohesion other than their legal systems: in shared customs, history, religion, song, and poetry. But for a people as diverse as ours, the law has had to bear more cultural weight. In the United States, for better or worse, law has become a principal carrier of those few values that our heterogeneous citizenry holds in common—freedom, equality, and inclusiveness of the community for which we accept common responsibility. Law is one of the chief means through which we order our lives together. The attack on reason and tradition in law thus strikes at the heart of our version of the democratic experiment.

I would not wish to be understood to be saying that the legal profession has entirely capitulated to the tradition of antitraditionalism. The bar still contains a fair number of men and women who take pride in their craft, and who endeavor to follow Abraham Lincoln’s advice to lawyers to be peace-makers among neighbors. On the bench there are still many independent judges who are not afraid to exercise judgment, and who endeavor to do so modestly and objectively. Such judges, as Paul Carrington has observed, are in an important sense models for the functioning of the rest of government, beacons by which public servants of all sorts “are led in the direction of restrained adherence to principle.” Even in the legal academy, one can still find an occasional figure like Archibald Cox, who dared to speak recently of his “deep belief that judges and academic scholars have an obligation to put aside all private predilections, commitments, self-interest, using only the most disinterested and detached reason they can bring to bear.”

But the legal profession is changing. Many practitioners are now more accurately described as businessmen and women than as members of a liberal profession. And certain other developments in the practice cannot be entirely unrelated to the atmosphere in the academy. For the teaching that all rules are indeterminate includes the rules of ethics that were once thought to impose limits on what a lawyer might or might not do. And one may surmise too—though this would be hard to prove—that years of portraying legal reasoning as mere window dressing may have contributed to a certain neglect of craftsmanship.

All this is beginning to sound as though, in the

legal world, darkness is once again creeping over the abyss, where our old enemy, chaos, lies waiting. Certainly our three American legal traditions—each in its way representing a human effort to hold the chaotic forces of power, passion, and self-interest in check—are not enjoying their finest hour. If I were to try to imagine one of today's students updating Roberto Unger's description of the elite academy, it might go something like this: "When we came, most professors had ceased even to pretend that law was anything other than power and preference. Their legal apostasy often coexisted, however, with a fervent devotion to this or that new cause or dogma. Disdaining their ancestors, they did not hesitate to live off the inheritance amassed by the labor of others. Turning their backs on the laity (who still naively looked to law for justice), they decked their altars with mirrors—into which they gazed long and attentively, self-made men worshipping their creators."

The bleakness of this picture is mitigated, however, by the reminder that other legal dark ages have passed away. After a copy of the *Corpus Juris Civilis* was rediscovered at Amalfi in the eleventh century, it took only a few hundred years for Europeans to build up an impressive legal system.

Then, too, in theology—as Avery Dulles has pointed out—the sources continue to radiate great liberating power. They provide each new generation with "a platform from which we can see and judge the present differently from the way in which the present sees and judges itself." There is an analogous platform in law, but a shakier one. What provides it, I believe, is not some particular source or sources, but the distinctive common law method of reasoning. The platform is shaky because common law reasoning has to start from premises that are doubtful or in dispute, and because it does not aim at certainty, but only at determining which of opposing positions supported by strong evidence and convincing reasons should be accepted. We may concede to Holmes & Co. that the open texture of this sort of reasoning does permit bias to creep in, and that its reliance on precedent can preserve not only the wisdom, but also the sins and ignorance and power relations of the past. We must admit as well that its conclusions are flawed, due to our

own limitations and the limitations of those upon whose accomplishments we build.

But when all that is conceded, the fact remains, as Aristotle pointed out long ago, that dialectical reasoning is the only form of reasoning that is of much use in "the realm of human affairs," where premises *are* uncertain, but where, though we can't be sure of being right, it is crucial to keep trying to reach better rather than worse outcomes. It is time for lawyers and philosophers alike to recognize that common law reasoning is an operating model of that dialectical process, and that its modest capacity to guard against, and correct for, bias and arbitrariness is no small thing. Over time, the recurrent, cumulative, and potentially self-correcting processes of experiencing, understanding, and judging enable us to overcome some of our own errors and biases, the errors and biases of our culture, and the errors and biases embedded in the data we receive from those who have gone before us. As Benjamin N. Cardozo once put it, "In the endless process of testing and retesting, there is a constant rejection of the dross."

And so, by a long and circuitous route, I come back to the proposition with which I began: that human creativity is inescapably dependent on what has gone before. This is not a very remarkable proposition. Perhaps what ought to seem remarkable is only the extent to which so many practitioners of the human sciences seem to want to ignore it.

As for what might emerge if legal theorists were to turn back to law, and to consciously appropriate their own tradition of open-ended, dialectical, probabilistic reasoning, who knows? Creativity is mysterious not only in its origins but also in its outcome. An Eskimo creation myth makes this point in a charming way. At the beginning of the world, the story goes, Raven the Creator planted a seed. From the seed came a vine, and on the vine in time there grew a pod. One day the pod ripened and fell to the ground and out of it climbed the first man. Raven, the great black bird, walked round and round the man, inspecting him from top to toe, and finally asked, "What are you?" "How should I know," said the man, "you were here first." "Well," said Raven, "I planted that seed, I created that vine and that pod, but I never thought something like you would come out of it!"^[7]

Tradition and Creativity in Theology

Avery Dulles

The ideas of “tradition” and “creativity” seem at first glance to be opposed and incompatible. Tradition says continuity; creativity says innovation and hence discontinuity. With the proper distinctions, however, it may be possible to show that the two are not only compatible but mutually supportive.

The question arises on at least two distinct levels. On one level, tradition is considered in the sociological sense, as a factor in the life of society and culture, including the arts. Tradition is the process by which a specific set of ideas or customs is perpetuated, continuing to influence new developments. On a second level, tradition is considered as a specifically theological entity. Christian faith, as generally understood, is built on the conviction that God’s saving act in Christ is a definitive reality that is to be proclaimed and believed by all future generations. For its continued existence the Church depends upon the mediation of that saving event. Tradition in the theological sense refers to this process of transmission. Theologically it must be asked whether faithful mediation of the past redemptive act leaves room for, requires, or even perhaps enhances human creativity, and conversely, whether human creativity contributes to the mediation of the past event.

I

The concept of tradition has a long history in theology. In the New Testament, the noun *paradosis* and the verb *paradidomi* are used in several senses. In the Gospels, Jesus sometimes speaks disparagingly of rabbinic or Pharisaic tradition as a device for nullifying the word of God.

For example, he reprimands the scribes and Pharisees for attaching too much importance to ablutions before meals, and even more for the practice of dedicating money to God (the *korban*) as a means of evading the obligation to support their aged parents (Matt. 15:1-9; Mark 7:1-15). Paul, while he is familiar with the concept of merely human traditions (Gal. 1:14; Col. 2:8), also uses the term to signify divine or apostolic tradition, to which Christians are bound. He exhorts the Thessalonians to hold fast to the traditions they have learned (2 Thess. 2:15). In writing to the Corinthians he reminds them of their obligation to stand by the tradition concerning Christ’s institution of the Eucharist (1 Cor. 11:23) and the tradition concerning the appearances of the risen Jesus (1 Cor. 15:3 ff.).

In the early Church, theologians such as Irenaeus and Tertullian insisted against the Gnostics that the authentic doctrine had been passed on in the Church from the apostles to the legitimate pastors, and that it was not to be found through human philosophical constructions. Gregory of Nyssa, a good representative of the fourth century, writes: “We have, as more than sufficient guarantee of the truth of our teaching, tradition, that is, the truth that has come down to us by succession from the apostles, as an inheritance.” Basil and others distinguish between things known from Scripture and things known from tradition. “Among the doctrines and the definitions preserved in the Church,” Basil writes, “we hold some on the basis

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of written teaching and others we have received, transmitted secretly, from apostolic tradition. All are of equal value for piety."

Until the late Middle Ages the dominant tendency was to treat Scripture as the basic text of revelation and to rely on tradition, especially patristic tradition, for the authoritative interpretation of Scripture. By the fourteenth century, however, some theologians were beginning to look on tradition as an independent source of revealed truths not attested in Scripture.

The problem of the relationship between Scripture and tradition became acute in the sixteenth century, when many Protestants took the position that Scripture alone was the norm by which all doctrines and practices were to be tested. The Council of Trent, relying on authorities such as Basil, responded that Scripture was not a sufficient rule of faith, and that the Church was bound also by traditions concerning faith and morals that had been continuously handed down from Christ and the apostles.

Since the Council of Trent the concept of tradition has been nuanced in several different ways. Many theologians used the term (usually in the plural, *traditions*) in an objective sense to mean revealed truths handed down from apostolic times by channels other than the canonical Scriptures. Others used the term to designate the process of transmitting the apostolic heritage in the Church, regardless of whether the content was also attested by Scripture. Thirdly, tradition came to mean a criterion to which theologians could appeal to establish the authenticity of certain doctrines and practices that were, as the phrase goes, "proved by tradition." The consensus of the Fathers and the testimony of the liturgy were instances of tradition in this normative sense.

More important for our present purposes is the emergence in the nineteenth century of still another usage. Under the influence of romanticism (and, I suspect, also of Kant), the term "tradition" began to be understood more subjectively as a collective sense of the faith supernaturally imparted to the Church by the Holy Spirit. In his *Die Einheit in der Kirche* (1825) the Catholic Tübingen theologian Johann Adam Möhler depicted tradition as a mysterious inner principle or power of spiritual life. "Tradition," he wrote, "is the living influence of the Holy Spirit animating the whole body of the faithful, perpetuating itself through all times, continually living, and yet expressing itself in bodily forms." For Möhler, therefore, tradition or the living Gospel, continuously proclaimed in the Church, extends to the whole spirit of Christianity and to all its doctrines. While recognizing that tradition inevitably embodies itself in language, Möhler spoke particularly of "interior" tradition,

by which he meant the "mysterious, invisible side of the spiritual power of life that perpetuates itself and perdures in the Church." Individual Christians, according to Möhler, had access to tradition by their incorporation in the Church, the primary carrier of tradition. The sense of the faith was constant, since the faith did not change, but it was also living and dynamic, since the faith was experienced and articulated in different forms in different times and cultures.

Early in the twentieth century the Catholic concept of tradition was further developed by the lay philosopher Maurice Blondel, who tried to find a *via media* between the errors he attributed respectively to the Modernists and to the Scholastics. The Modernists, according to Blondel, regarded tradition as a pure process without any stable or determinate content. For them, he said, Christian beginnings were a mere point of departure. Their view of tradition was Protean, since the past was always up for reassessment. On the other hand, the Scholastics, as perceived by Blondel, fell into a fixist or Procrustean position, which Blondel labeled "Veterist." They inculcated servile conformity to a static given and overlooked the need for personal involvement on the part of the believer.

Blondel attempted to transcend both the Modernist and Veterist positions by proposing a synthesis. Tradition, he said, is not the mere transmission of received teachings, for in that case it would be only a poor substitute for written texts. Unlike written archives, tradition preserves the living reality of the past, including elements that cannot be stated in words. It is the bearer of tacit knowledge, and is most effectively transmitted and received through faithful action. The stability of tradition, for Blondel, comes not from verbal or conceptual conformity with prior statements but from fidelity to the reality intended by the statements. That reality points toward the future: "However paradoxical it may sound, one can therefore maintain that Tradition anticipates and illuminates the future and is disposed to do so by the effort which it makes to remain faithful to the past."

On the eve of Vatican II a number of scholarly theologians took up the insights of Möhler and Blondel. The Tübingen theologian Josef Rupert Geiselmair argued that Scripture and tradition should not be seen as two parallel deposits of revelation but as two witnesses to one and the same body of truth. The French Dominican Yves Congar, after a thorough investigation of the history of the question, concluded that "no article of the Church's belief is held on the authority of Scripture independently of Tradition, and none on the authority of Tradition independently of Scripture." The apostolic heritage, initially crystallized in Scripture, continues to be transmitted through living tradi-

tion, and only in the light of that tradition discloses its true meaning. Following Blondel, Congar was convinced that tradition in its historical journey "is as much development as memory and conservation." The deposit of faith, as received today, comes with the enrichment that results from its having been "lived, pondered, and expressed by generations of believers inhabited and vivified by the Spirit of Pentecost."

Thanks to the active collaboration of theologians such as Congar, Vatican Council II espoused a highly dynamic concept of tradition. According to the Constitution on Divine Revelation (*Dei Verbum*), which devotes its second chapter to the theme, tradition is the way in which the Church "perpetuates and transmits to all generations all that it is and all that it believes." Tradition consists not simply of words ("oral tradition") but also of ways of living and acting. It is, moreover, capable of growth as the Church meditates on the Word of God, undergoes spiritual experiences, and receives instruction from its hierarchical authorities. The tradition is ceaselessly sustained by the Holy Spirit, who makes the voice of the gospel resound in the Church and keeps the Church in uninterrupted conversation with God. "As the centuries advance, the Church constantly tends toward the fullness of divine truth, until the words of God reach their consummation in the Church."

Although there is no direct contradiction between Trent and Vatican II, the concept of tradition underwent a considerable evolution between the two councils. Trent used the word "tradition" only in the plural, and in an objective sense, to mean particular beliefs and practices that were continuously handed down in the Church, having been entrusted to the apostles by Christ and the Holy Spirit. Although Trent did not explicitly say that there are any truths in tradition alone, it was generally interpreted as teaching that tradition, as a second source, attested to some revealed truths not certified in Scripture.

Vatican II in *Dei Verbum* uses the term "tradition" only in the singular (except in one instance, where it is quoting the New Testament). It speaks of tradition primarily in a subjective or active sense, to mean the process by which the apostolic heritage is transmitted and received in the Church. Whereas Trent had emphasized oral tradition, Vatican II gives equal emphasis to transmission by action. Unlike Trent, which looked upon traditions as invariant, Vatican II understands tradition as a sense of the faith that develops organically under the aegis of the Holy Spirit. Finally, Vatican II seems to suggest that there is no revealed truth that is attested either by Scripture alone or by tradition alone. It declares that Scripture and tradition "form one single deposit of the Word of God" and "are so connected

and associated that one does not stand without the other."

The shift in the dominant concept of tradition in twentieth-century Catholicism has facilitated a more positive assessment of the relationship between tradition and creativity. Before looking into this relationship, however, we must examine the meaning of creativity.

II

The term creativity, as currently used, has very little grounding in the classical theological heritage. The ancient and medieval authors held that creative power is proper to God alone. Creation had a generally accepted definition: *productio rei ex nihilo sui et subjecti* (production of something from no preexisting component or material). No creature, even the highest of the angels, could create anything at all. Most theologians have followed St. Thomas in holding that creatures could not even cooperate as instrumental causes in creating. It was commonly taught that each human soul, as an immaterial substance, came into being by a creative act, and hence was immediately produced by God.

Creativity, to be sure, is not God's only property. God conserves and cares for all that he has made. Creation would be pointless unless God preserved creatures in existence and enabled them to achieve their proper goal. God's presence and activity, therefore, may be discerned not only by the occurrence of utter novelty but also, at times, by extraordinary durability and fruitfulness.

The attribution of creativity to human beings seems to have originated in literary and artistic criticism. John Donne in one of his sermons, probably preached in 1632, says: "Poetry is a counterfeit Creation, and makes things that are not, as though they were." Similarly, John Dryden, in a preface to *Troilus and Cressida*, wrote that in the character of Caliban, "Shakespeare seems there to have created a person which was not in Nature, a boldness which, at first sight, would appear intolerable." As Edward Shils remarks with reference to passages such as these, "The artist became a 'creator' and thereby assumed god-like lineaments."

During the hegemony of romanticism it became standard practice to dismiss tradition as a hindrance to spontaneity and creativity. It was widely supposed that artists of genius, having access to immediate inspiration, could do without human instruction. Rousseau and the primitivists urged artists to express their personal emotions without restraint or inhibition. Nietzsche identified enthusiasm not with Apollonian serenity but with Dionysiac intoxication. Modernist critics measured creativeness not by truth but by originality. Thus antitraditionalism, as Irving Babbitt observed, developed

a powerful, though misguided, tradition of its own.

The theme of creativity was popularized in philosophy by Henri Bergson, among others. Bergson held that the process of evolution is sustained by a vital, creative impulse that continually breaks through to higher levels. Although the *élan vital* eludes the static and abstract categories of discursive reason, it can in some fashion be glimpsed by means of intuition. Human beings vaguely intuit their own freedom and are thereby put in contact with the creative activity of the cosmic vital process. Bergson's immanent *élan vital* differs markedly from the Jewish and Christian idea of God as creator, but Bergson in his later work came to recognize the existence of a transcendent creative activity. By means of the creative energy of love, Bergson contended, God brings into being "creators, that He may have, besides Himself, beings worthy of His love."

Among Bergson's disciples we must recognize the Russian Orthodox thinkers Lossky and Berdyaev. Unlike Thomas Aquinas and the theologians of the Catholic tradition, they maintained that human beings, like God, are creative, and that all creation is *ex nihilo*. Human freedom, according to Berdyaev, is self-creation; creation is continuous.

A number of French Catholic intellectuals were influenced by Bergson. Inspired in part by Bergson, the poet Charles Péguy explored the connection between creativity and tradition. He inveighed against the clerical Catholicism of his day for having lapsed into formalism and privatization, and for failing to renew society. Catholicism in the nineteenth century, he commented, had lost its hold on the people and had become "a kind of higher religion for the higher classes of society and of the nation, a miserable sort of distinguished religion for ostensibly distinguished people." Péguy built into the concept of tradition Bergson's idea of *élan vital*. By simply imitating its own past forms, he argued, tradition becomes atrophied and moribund. Tradition must renew itself by constantly returning to its own original inspiration. Tradition is thus, in the most literal sense, a resource. Péguy was apparently the first to use in French the term *ressourcement*, in the sense of the self-renewal of a people from the original sources of its own life. He wrote in 1913: "Nothing is more thrillingly beautiful than the spectacle of a people that is raising itself up by an inner movement, by a deep *ressourcement* of its former pride, by a renewal of the instincts of its race." Against a superficial and imperfect tradition, Péguy maintained, there is no remedy except to reactivate a deeper and more perfect tradition, and to sound the depths from which a richer humanity can well up.

The Thomistic philosopher Jacques Maritain, who had been a pupil of Bergson, built bridges between him and Aquinas. In his richly suggestive book *Creative Intuition in Art and Poetry*, Maritain sought to incorporate themes from the romantic tradition, comparing its concept of genius with the classical theological doctrine of the infused gifts of the Holy Spirit. Poetic intuition was for Maritain, as for Bergson, something suprarational, resembling in that respect the connatural knowledge of divine things bestowed upon the saints. The sources of creativity, he said, lie at a level beneath the sunlit surface inhabited by explicit concepts and judgments, at a point that is "hidden in the primordial translucid night of the intimate vitality of the soul." Poetry therefore emanates from the spiritual unconscious, which may also be called the preconscious.

Poetic intuition, according to Maritain, has both cognitive and creative components. In its cognitive aspect, it is directed toward concrete realities that speak to the soul in its inmost being. Through intuition poets can perceive the deeper dimensions both of reality and of their own subjectivity.

In its creative aspect poetic intuition is turned toward expressive activity. Maritain asserted, with others before him, that the poet is like a god. Poetic creativity is free, "for it only tends to engender in beauty, which is a transcendental, and involves an infinity of possible realizations and possible choices." But the poet is only "a poor god" because poetic activity depends on stimulation from an external world and on the mediational function of a language that must be learned. For all that, however, poetry and art express the subjectivity of the author, somewhat as the created world expresses the subjectivity of God.

Before the age of romanticism, Maritain remarked, poets and artists were not interested in reflective self-awareness. The advent of reflexivity could be a gain, but it has unfortunately been accompanied in many cases by an impoverishing shift to the self-centered ego. At its best, Maritain believed, poetic creativity transcends the private concerns of the individual. True creativity engages the deepest recesses of the self but draws them into the service of the transcendent. Thus there is an analogy between the "I" of the poet and that of the saint.

So far as I am aware, Maritain did not apply his reflections on creativity to the theology of tradition. Combining what he says about the gifts of the Holy Spirit with Möhler's mystical ecclesiology, one might say that the person of faith, especially the saint, grasps the profound meaning of past expressions of the faith by dwelling in a community of faith and acquiring a certain connaturality with the things of God. The religious person's awareness of the spiritual realities attested

by the tradition is in the first instance prereflexive and suprarational. Tradition therefore expresses itself primarily by life and action and only secondarily by explicit statements. Authentic expressions of the life of faith communicate not simply the insights of individual believers but the faith of the community. The expressions can be creative because the revelation borne by the tradition is transcendent; it is open to an infinite variety of possible linguistic and cultural embodiments.

III

Antitraditionalism, as we have already seen, has developed a vigorous tradition of its own. Ralph Waldo Emerson is one of the many who railed against tradition as a hindrance to creativity. In his essay on "Nature" (1836), he wrote: "Our age is retrospective. It builds the sepulchres of the fathers. It writes biographies, histories, and criticism. The foregoing generations beheld God and nature face to face; we through their eyes. Why should we not have a poetry and philosophy of insight and not of tradition, and a religion by revelation to us, and not a history of theirs?" The following year, in his famous Phi Beta Kappa address of 1837, Emerson complained that American institutions were overly concerned with the heritage of the past, and were failing to arouse the spontaneous powers of students. In his address to the Senior Class in Divinity at Harvard (July 15, 1838) he applied these principles more directly to theology, objecting to the tenets that the Bible is a closed revelation and that inspiration is a thing of the past.

Emerson's complaints contained a grain of truth. Learning about the past should not be a substitute for dealing with the present. But what Emerson assails under the name of tradition is very different from what Péguy, for example, seeks to defend. To clarify the difference one might distinguish, as does Jaroslav Pelikan, between tradition as "the living faith of the dead" and traditionalism, "the dead faith of the living." Traditionalism, he asserts, is what gives tradition its bad name.

Some years earlier, T. S. Eliot made a similar observation. In his celebrated essay on "Tradition and the Individual Talent" (1919) he wrote:

If the only form of tradition, of handing down, consisted in following the ways of the immediate generation before us in a blind or timid adherence to its successes, "tradition" should positively be discouraged. We have seen many such simple currents soon lost in the sand; and novelty is better than repetition. Tradition is a matter of much wider significance. It cannot be inherited, and if you want it you must obtain it by great labor.

Eliot then went on to explain that a writer cannot be traditional without a vivid sense "not only of the pastness of the past, but of its presence." This historical sense, involving a synthetic perception of past and present in relation to each other, "makes a writer most acutely conscious of his own place in time, of his own contemporaneity."

Among theologically alert authors there is a growing consensus that to let the past live, one must grasp its spirit and adapt its forms. Fidelity requires discernment. Building on some texts of Péguy, Congar points out that there are two levels of fidelity. On a superficial level, fidelity may be understood as adherence to the approved forms. But on a deeper level, the faithful adherent is one who penetrates to the meaning, the principle, the intention. Only the latter type of fidelity is open to progress and development. Following in the footsteps of John Henry Newman, Congar asserts that the dynamic idea at the basis of Christianity transcends all the forms in which it can be objectified. Reflection on the idea gives rise to continually new insights and propositions, none of which exhausts what was implicitly known from the beginning. In Newman's perspective, therefore, development is an inner dimension of tradition itself.

Many Christians, as Congar points out, fail to perceive that fidelity to the past calls for creative appropriation. All too often they live their faith on the level of received ideas and customs, which they confuse with tradition. Gabriel Marcel, making essentially the same point, remarked that orthodoxy is commonly confused with mere religious conformism, whereas true orthodoxy "creates those conditions rooted in the supernatural which unfold the most spacious and unbounded horizons for human knowledge and action."

It follows from all this that to represent the tradition authentically one must be acutely sensitive to the current situation and to present problems. Like the artist and the poet, the theologian must seek to extend the tradition and thereby contribute to it. Mere imitation is never enough. The contemporary work, as Eliot pointed out, takes its place in the succession that comes down from the past. The past is modified by the introduction of each new member in the series and is reinterpreted in relation to what has emerged from it. The extension may itself be creative if the new work actualizes some previously unforeseen possibility.

Those who extend the tradition depend on previous tradition as the matrix of their work. Classical texts are those that retain through the centuries their power to awaken new insights. They give rise to a series of subsequent works that attest to their disclosive power. Especially is this true of canonical texts, which have normative value for an

abiding community. Each generation is challenged to interpret and apply the text in ways that are faithful to the original intention and at the same time responsive to the needs and possibilities of the moment. Past interpretations that have been judged successful provide examples and models for the present.

For Christians the Bible is the canonical text par excellence. As an inspired record of a definitive revelation, it generates a long history of interpretation, some instances of which come to be recognized as permanently valid. Confident that Christ abides with the Church in all ages, thoughtful Christians reread the Bible in the light of what it has meant to the believing community down through the centuries.

Confidence in the tradition never excuses the contemporary thinker or writer from going back to the sources. Since subsequent commentary cannot take the place of the foundational records of the faith, the tradition must be continually renewed by reference to its sources. The *nouvelle théologie* of the 1940s was powerful because it went back to earlier and more authentic sources, which had not been sufficiently studied in their own right: the Scriptures, the church fathers, and the medieval *doctores*. The program of *aggiornamento*, articulated by Pope John XXIII at Vatican II, was a direct consequence of the *ressourcement* of the 1940s. The council laid down the principle: "Every ecclesial renewal essentially consists in an increase of fidelity to the Church's own calling." Congar had said almost the same thing more than a decade earlier: "The great law of Catholic reformism will be to begin by a return to the principles of Catholicism."

Even in the secular sphere, tradition has liberative power. It expands our horizons and thereby prevents us from becoming imprisoned in our own personal limitations and in the transitory fashions of our day. It provides us with a platform from which we can look critically at the present and judge it differently than it judges itself. In Christian theology tradition liberates insofar as it binds its adherents to the vital sources of their life—the revealed truth that makes us free. The truth of the Gospel is ever fruitful in new insights. The theologian cannot fail to be stimulated and inspired by gaining familiarity with ideas resulting from what Newman calls "intuitive spiritual perception in scripturally informed and deeply religious minds."

The study of ancient texts and models, even those contained in Holy Scripture, does not automatically yield creative insights. In order to be attuned to the lasting significance of the classics one must have acquired a certain skill or facility in interpretation. As Michael Polanyi explains in *Personal Knowledge* (1964), this is an art that cannot be learned by

prescription. The novice must assimilate a multitude of particulars that cannot be specified in detail. They are normally passed down by example and supervised performance under the guidance of masters.

By watching the master and emulating his efforts in the presence of his example, the apprentice picks up the rules of the art, including those which are not explicitly known by the master himself. These hidden rules can be assimilated only by a person who surrenders himself to that extent uncritically to the imitation of another. A society which wants to preserve a fund of personal knowledge must submit to tradition.

By assiduous discipleship one can gain a personal mastery of the art and be liberated from mechanical submission to formal and explicit rules. This aptitude, as Polanyi explains, is especially crucial for making original advances. The more deeply the discoverer is rooted in the tradition, the more resources will he or she be able to bring to unsolved problems. Lively appreciation of the great achievements of the past fires the mind with confidence and zeal, and provides hints for the solution of new problems. By drawing analogies from earlier discoveries the creative imagination becomes better qualified to discern intelligible patterns in puzzling or confusing data.

Paradoxically, therefore, the most innovative artists and scientists have often been the most deeply traditional. Each renaissance has been, at root, a *ressourcement*. Literary revolutionaries such as T. S. Eliot were deeply immersed in the classical sources. James Joyce's *Ulysses* must be understood against the background of a long tradition stretching back to Homer. So, likewise, the theologians who have made the greatest contributions by their personal genius have taken pains to labor within the tradition. What would Luther have been without Augustine, Newman without Athanasius, or de Lubac without Origen? One may apply to the theologian what Eliot says of the poet: "We shall often find that not only the best, but the most individual parts of his work may be those in which the dead poets, his ancestors, assert their immortality most vigorously."

A privileged locus of tradition in the life of the Church is the liturgy. Polanyi speaks in this connection of a dialectic of "dwelling in" and "breaking out." The worshiper's tacit powers are trained and activated by participation in the traditional rites. Discovery takes place in a moment of ecstasy produced by dwelling in spirit

within the fabric of the religious ritual, which is potentially the highest degree of indwelling

that is conceivable. For ritual comprises a sequence of things to be said and gestures to be made which involve the whole body and alert our whole existence. Anyone sincerely saying and doing these things in a place of worship could not fail to be completely absorbed by them.

At a later point in *Personal Knowledge* Polanyi expands on the heuristic character of religious worship:

The words of prayer and confession, the actions of the ritual, the lesson, the sermon, the church itself, are the clues of the worshipper's striving towards God. They guide his feelings of contrition and gratitude and his craving for the divine presence, while keeping him safe from distracting thoughts.

These assertions receive ample confirmation from theology. When the inspired Scriptures are effectively proclaimed and when the community, invoking the Holy Spirit, responds in adoration, the very reality of the *tradendum* makes itself present. By means of the proclaimed word and the sacramental action, the living Christ draws near with his creative power, transforming the mind, heart, and imagination of the worshipers.

In fields such as art, music, and literature, it has been persuasively argued that creativity depends on "a fundamental encounter with transcendence." "In most cultures," says George Steiner, "in the witness borne to poetry and art until the most recent modernity, the source of 'otherness' has been actualized or metaphorized as transcendent. It has been invoked as divine, as magical, or daimonic." In many great works of art, such a referral to the transcendent is explicit. Whatever may be true in other fields, this relation to transcendence is essential in theology. The Christian tradition, stemming as it does from the presence of the God-man within history, perpetuates both the memory and the presence of its founder. Transmitting the ancient heritage in ever new frameworks, the Church continually reactualizes the mystery that is at the heart of its being.

In a certain sense tradition may be regarded as the Christian mystery transmitting itself. It is, in the words of Henri de Lubac, "the very Word of God both perpetuating and renewing itself under the action of the Spirit of God, . . . the living Word entrusted to the Church and to those to whom the Church never ceases to give birth." For this reason, says de Lubac, "Tradition, according to the Fathers of the Church, is in fact just the opposite of a burden of the past: it is a vital energy, a propulsive as much as a protective force."

The Christian mystery transcends past, present,

and future; it rejuvenates those who come into contact with it. Pascal put this well in one of his letters to Mademoiselle de Roannez (November 5, 1656):

The truths of Christianity are certainly new things, but they must be renewed continually; for this newness, which cannot be displeasing to God, any more than the old man can please him, is different from earthly newness, in that the things of the world, however new they may be, grow old as they endure; whereas the new spirit continues to renew itself increasingly as it endures. "The old man perishes," says St. Paul, "and is renewed from day to day," and will only be perfectly new in eternity where the New Canticle, of which David speaks in the Psalm of Lauds, will be forever sung, that is to say, the song that springs from the new spirit of charity.

The novelty in Christianity points beyond all time to the eschatological future. The glorification that has been accomplished in Jesus is still to be accomplished in the Church and the cosmos. Cherishing the memory of its risen Lord, the Church is drawn forward toward its final destiny, which it anticipates in hope.

The very process of transmission is affected by the character of that which is transmitted—the Christ who has gone before us into the glory to which we aspire. Jürgen Moltmann shows how this eschatological dimension gives a creative quality to the Christian concept of tradition:

Christian tradition is then not to be understood as a handing on of something that has to be preserved, but as an event which summons the dead and the godless to life. . . . This is a creative event happening to what is vain, forsaken, lost, godless, and dead. It can therefore be designated as a *nova creatio ex nihilo*, whose continuity lies solely in the guaranteed faithfulness of God.

The same conclusion may be reinforced from another point of view. In the perspectives of theology, the primary bearer of tradition is not the individual or even the Church, but the Holy Spirit, who guides the Church into all truth. As Möhler pointed out, the Holy Spirit dwells in the hearts of the faithful, giving them a kind of instinct for, and inner affinity with, the truth of revelation. This Holy Spirit is the *Spiritus creator*, the Spirit who makes all things new. What comes from the Spirit is never a stale reproduction of the past.

The interaction between past and present in Christian tradition, though it has certain analogies in other fields, is unique and unparalleled. The

apostolic tradition, which remains accessible through the inspired texts of Scripture and through sacramental worship, transmits the living reality of the past and activates the spiritual powers of those who receive it. Rooted in the sources of faith, they can exercise creative fidelity. For the past to be living, it must in some mysterious way transcend

the divisions of time; it must become contemporaneous with the present and point the way into the future. Because Christ the Lord is "the same yesterday, today, and tomorrow," Christian tradition can rise to this challenge, ceaselessly bringing forth "new things and old."¹⁷

Journey Into Autumn

Once again, we are on the road early,
driving to see our son
wrestle with cancer for gold.
Clouds fall like a heavy eyelid
over the eastern sky, crowding
the tender light against the horizon—
healthy crimson, healthy orange compressed
by gray as thick as
blasts in leukemic marrow.
Birds fly everywhere before us: electrons
energized to higher shells by
the meager dawn. Life will, life must,
make do on little.

What do you think of all the beauty
squandered along this mournful road?
Tragedy may induce myopia.
Still, I notice the distant trees
like a remembrance of your hair; the young
light on a field, the color
of your neck; and the
unseen sun's halo, dark and
pink as your areola.
Turning on the radio, I hear
Billy Graham preach Christ crucified and
raised as God's sufficient grace, and I think
of our son clinging gracefully to life like
the stubborn leaves of
red November oaks.

Duane K. Caylor

Tradition and Creativity in the Writing of History

Gertrude Himmelfarb

For the historian, as for the philosopher, the quarrel between the Ancients and the Moderns is being superseded by a quarrel between the Moderns and the Postmoderns. If the great subversive principle of modernity is historicism—a form of relativism that locates the meaning of ideas and events so firmly in their historical context that history, rather than philosophy and nature, becomes the arbiter of truth—postmodernism is now confronting us with a far more subversive form of relativism, a relativism so radical, so absolute, as to be antithetical to both history and truth. For postmodernism denies not only suprahistorical truths but historical truths, truths relative to particular times and places. And that denial involves a repudiation of the historical enterprise as it has been understood and practiced until very recently.

Postmodernism—or poststructuralism, the terms are by now used interchangeably—is most familiar as a school of literary theory (and, in a more specialized sense, of architecture), but it has become prominent in such other disciplines as philosophy, anthropology, law, theology, and history. Deriving from Nietzsche, Heidegger, and others, its more immediate progenitors and most frequently cited authorities are Jacques Derrida and Michel Foucault. Derrida is generally associated with such “deconstructionist” ideas as the “aporia” of discourse, the indeterminacy and contrariness of language, the “fictive” and “duplicitous” nature

of signs and symbols, the dissociation of words from any presumed reality. Foucault is more directly responsible for the emphasis on the “power structure” immanent in language, not only in the particular signs and ideas that “privilege” the “hegemonic” groups in society, but in the very nature of rational, logical, coherent thought—“logocentric,” “totalizing,” “authoritarian” discourse, as it is characterized.

In literature, postmodernism amounts to a denial of the fixity of any “text,” of the authority of the author over the interpreter, of any “canon” that privileges great books over comic books. In law, it is a denial of the fixity of the Constitution, of the authority of the founders of the Constitution, and of the legitimacy of law itself, which is regarded as nothing more than an instrument of the ruling class. In philosophy, it is a denial of the fixity of language, of any correspondence between language and reality, indeed of any “essential” reality and thus of any proximate truth about reality. In history, it is a denial of the fixity of the past, of the reality of the past apart from what the historian chooses to make of it, and thus of any objective truth about the past. Postmodernist history, one might say, recognizes no reality principle, only the pleasure principle—history at the pleasure of the historian.

Postmodernist history can be understood only in relation to what might be called “modernist” history. Modernist history too, as it emerged in the nineteenth century, is relativistic, but with a difference, for its relativism is firmly rooted in reality. It is skeptical of any fixed or total truth about the past, but not of partial, contingent, incremental truths. More important, it does not

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deny the reality of the past itself. Like the political philosopher who makes it a principle to read the texts of the Ancients in the spirit of the Ancients, so the modernist historian reads and writes history in the same spirit, with a scrupulous regard for the historicity, the integrity, the actuality of the past. He makes a strenuous effort to enter into the minds and experiences of people in the past, to try to understand them as they understood themselves, to rely upon contemporary evidence as much as possible, to intrude his own views and assumptions as little as possible, to reconstruct to the best of his ability the past as it "actually was"—in Ranke's famous and now much-derided phrase.

Modernist history, like modernist literature and art, is an exacting discipline, requiring a great exercise of discipline, self-restraint, even self-sacrifice. The greatest of modernist poets, T. S. Eliot, once said, "The progress of an artist is a continual self-sacrifice, a continual extinction of personality." And so it is with the historian, who strives constantly to transcend his own present in order to recapture the past, to suppress his own personality in order to give life to generations long since dead. This self-sacrifice is all the greater because the historian is well aware that his effort will never entirely succeed, that the past will always, to some degree, elude him.

Historians, ancient and modern, have always known what postmodernism professes to have just discovered—that any work of history is vulnerable on three counts: the fallibility and deficiency of the historical record; the fallibility and selectivity of the historical process; and the fallibility and subjectivity of the historian. As long as historians have reflected upon their craft, they have known that the past cannot be recaptured in its totality, if only because the remains of the past are sparse and are themselves part of the present, so that the past itself is, in this sense, irredeemably present. They have also known that the writing of history necessarily entails selection and interpretation, that there is inevitable distortion in the very attempt to present a coherent account of an often inchoate past, that, therefore, every historical work is necessarily incomplete, imperfect, tentative.

Historians have also known—they would have to be extraordinarily obtuse not to know this—that they themselves live and act and think in their own present, that some of the assumptions they bring to history derive from their own culture, that others reflect their particular race, gender, and class, and that still others (although this is made much less of today) emanate from ideas and beliefs that are unique to themselves as individuals. It did not take Carl Becker, in 1931, to discover that "everyman [is] his own historian"; or Charles Beard, in 1934, to reveal that "each historian who writes history is the product of his age." Beard himself said that

these propositions had been familiar "for a century or more"—thus antedating even Marx. Forty years before Beard delivered his famous presidential address to the American Historical Association, William Sloane, the *echt* establishment professor of history at Columbia University, inaugurated the first issue of the *American Historical Review* with a lead article announcing: "History will not stay written. Every age demands a history written from its own standpoint—with reference to its own social conditions, its thought, its beliefs, and its acquisitions—and thus comprehensible to the men who live in it."

It is useful for historians to be reminded of what they have always known—the frailty, fallibility, and relativity of the historical enterprise—if only to realize that these familiar truths are not the great discoveries of postmodernism. They are, indeed, very different from the tidings brought by postmodernism. For the presumption of postmodernism is that *all* of history is fatally flawed, that because there is no absolute, total, final truth, there are no relative, partial, contingent truths. More important still is the presumption that because it is impossible to attain such truths, it is not only futile but positively baneful to aspire to them.

In a sense, modernism anticipated and tried to forestall the absolutistic relativism of postmodernism by creating a "discipline" of history. Conscious of the deficiencies both of the historian and of the historical record, acutely aware of the ambiguous relationship between past and present, the profession created a discipline of checks and controls designed to compensate for those deficiencies. This was the meaning of the historical revolution that drew upon such diverse sources as Enlightenment rationalism, Germanic scholarship, and academic professionalism, all of which converged to produce what was once called "critical history." (This is not to be confused with Nietzsche's "critical history," a history in the "service of life" in contrast to "monumental" and "antiquarian" history; or the neo-Marxist usage of "critical," as in "critical legal theory.")

Critical history put a premium on archival research and primary sources, on the authenticity of documents and the reliability of witnesses, on the need for substantiating and countervailing evidence, on the accuracy of quotations and citations, on prescribed forms of documentation in footnotes and bibliography, and on all the rest of the "methodology" that went into the "canon of evidence." The purpose of this methodology was twofold: to bring to the surface the infrastructure, as it were, of the historical work, thus making it accessible to the reader and subject to criticism; and to encourage the historian to a maximum exertion of objectivity in spite of all the incitements and

temptations to the contrary. Postmodernists deride this as the antiquated vestige of nineteenth-century positivism. But it was the norm of the profession until recently. "No one," John Higham wrote, "including the 'literary' historians, rejected the ideal of objectivity in the ordinary sense of unbiased truth; no one gave up the effort to attain it; and no one thought it wholly unapproachable." This was in 1965, well after Becker and Beard had "relativized" history but before Foucault and Derrida had "postmodernized" it.

This is the crucial distinction between modernists and postmodernists, between old-fashioned relativistic relativists, one might say, and the new absolutistic relativists. Where modernists tolerate relativism, postmodernists celebrate it. Where modernists, aware of the obstacles in the way of objectivity, take this as a challenge and make a strenuous effort to attain as much objectivity and unbiased truth as possible, postmodernists take the rejection of absolute truth as a deliverance from all truth, a release from the obligation to maintain any degree of objectivity or aspire to any kind of truth.

Critical or modernist history was once the antithesis of traditional history—premodern, mythical, honorific, heroic history—what Nietzsche called "monumental" history. For the postmodernist, however, critical history is only another form of traditional history, concealing its ideological structure behind a scholarly facade of footnotes and facts ("facts," in the lexicon of postmodernism). This facade, the pretense of factuality and objectivity, compounds the deceit by fostering the illusion of truth. To "demythologize" or "demystify" traditional history, postmodernism has to expose not only its ideology—the ideology that serves the interest of the hegemonic, privileged, patriarchal groups in society—but also its methodology, the scholarly apparatus that gives it a specious credibility. This is the twofold agenda of postmodernism: to free history from the shackles of an authoritarian ideology and from the constraints of a delusive methodology. The ultimate aim is even more ambitious: to liberate us all from the coercive ideas of reality and truth.

Theodore Zeldin was one of the first historians (as distinct from philosophers of history) to rebel against what he called the "tyrannies" of history: causality, chronology, and collectivity (nationality and class). Instead of the traditional narrative history based upon these categories, he proposed to create a history, in the manner of a *pointilliste* painting, composed entirely of unconnected dots. This would have the double advantage of liberating the historian from the tyrannies of the discipline, and liberating the reader from the tyranny of the historian, since the reader would be

free to make "what lines he thinks fit for himself." More recently, Zeldin has gone so far by way of liberation as to liberate himself from the tyranny of history itself. Truth, he now says, can be found only in "free history," otherwise known as fiction—in testimony to which he proceeded to write a novel with the apt title *Happiness*.

Not all postmodernists go so far as Zeldin in seeking that ultimate liberation from history, but all do share his aversion to the conventions and categories of traditional history. This is not the familiar kind of revisionism that involves the revision of a particular historical account, analysis, or interpretation of an event or period. It is not revisionism at all, but rather a repudiation of all of traditional history—a profound skepticism about the assumptions, intentions, methods, and conclusions of earlier works of history, and a relativism tantamount to nihilism about the very enterprise of history.

To the traditional historian, the postmodernist philosophy of history appears to be more philosophical than historical and more literary than philosophical. Hayden White, the most systematic exponent of this genre, opens his most influential work, *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe*, with a chapter entitled "The Poetics of History," explaining that each of the subjects dealt with, from Hegel to Croce, represents a particular aspect of the "historical imagination": metaphor, metonymy, irony, romance, comedy, tragedy, satire. (Another of his essays is aptly titled "The Historical Text as Literary Artifact.")

For the postmodernist, there is no distinction between history and philosophy or between history and literature. All of history, in this view, is esthetic and philosophic, its only meaning or "reality" being that which the historian chooses to give it in accord with his own sensibility and disposition. What the traditional historian sees as an event that actually occurred in the past, the postmodernist sees as a "text" that exists only in the present. And like any text, the historical event has to be parsed, glossed, construed, interpreted by the historian, much as a poem or novel is by the critic.

The resemblance between postmodernist history and postmodernist literary criticism extends to the fact that in both disciplines theory has become a calling in itself. Just as there are professors of literature who never engage in the actual interpretation of literary works—who even disdain interpretation as an inferior vocation—so there are professors of history who have never (at least to judge by their published work) done research in or written about an actual historical event or period. Their professional careers are devoted to theoretical speculation about the nature of history in general

and to the promotion of some particular methodology or ideology of history.

A traditional historian, who still believes in the distinction between the philosophy of history and the practice of history (and who suspects that most philosophers of history know more about philosophy than about history), is not surprised to find postmodernism dominating the pages of *History and Theory*. But when it appears in the *American Historical Review*, and not on the part of philosophers of history but of actual historians, even the most placid historian, unmoved by the winds of doctrine, can hardly fail to take notice. Thus an essay in a recent issue of the *Review* casually observes that "contemporary historians seldom believe anymore that they can or should try to capture 'the truth,'" but that this does not absolve them from passing judgment on their subjects. The author, Michael Kazin, concludes by citing the authority of an earlier president of the American Historical Association, Gordon Wright, who had given it as his credo that "our search for truth ought to be quite consciously suffused by a commitment to some deeply held humane values." The quotation actually speaks against Kazin, for it makes the closest connection between truth and humane values. But that was 1975, when it was still possible to speak respectfully of the "search for truth," and, indeed, to speak of truth without the ironic use of quotation marks.

The philosopher Richard Rorty recently reported, with unconcealed glee, that it is getting more and more difficult to find "a real live metaphysical prig" who believes in such outmoded ideas as "reality" and "truth." One can still find a good number of historians—"real live historical prigs"—who persist in believing in those ideas. But one can also find more and more historians today, and not only philosophers of history, who share Rorty's scorn for such priggish ideas.

The disdain for truth, not as an ultimate philosophical principle but as a practical, guiding rule of historical scholarship, was dramatically illustrated a few years ago by a controversy that erupted in the profession and was widely reported in the press. A book on the Weimar Republic by a young Princeton historian, David Abraham, was criticized by several eminent historians for being full of errors—misquotations, faulty citations, unwarranted deductions from the sources; whereupon an equally eminent group of historians rallied to the defense of the author in a symposium in the *Radical History Review*. The first line of defense was to impugn the political and personal motives of the critics: political, on the ground that the real objection to the book is not scholarly but ideological (the thesis of the book being Marxist or neo-Marxist); and personal, the older "establishment"

historians resenting the novice who presumes to infringe on their turf. The second line of defense was to belittle both the seriousness of the errors and the standards of scholarship that make so much of them. The mistakes are said to be innocent faults of transcription such as occur in any archival research. (It is not explained how it happens that most of them tend to support the contentious thesis.) Besides, the truth or falsity of specific quotations and assertions is of little moment; what matters is the plausibility of the thesis itself. An article by Thomas Bender, entitled "'Facts' and History," defines the "historical imagination" as a process of "imaginative creation," and warns young historians not to become "fact fetishists" like some of their benighted elders.

A truly creative exercise of the historical imagination is a recent book by the distinguished historian Simon Schama. Entitled, with conscious irony, *Dead Certainties (Unwarranted Speculations)*, the book consists of two essays tenuously related to each other, each reinterpreting an episode in American history. The first, on General Wolfe, the commander of the British forces in North America in the Seven Years' War who died in the battle of Quebec, is meant to demythologize the conventional heroic account of his death and thus the "patriotic martyrology" traditionally associated with the "pieties of imperial history." The essay opens and closes with a memoir by a soldier present on that occasion, related in the first person and in the colloquial speech of the time, which presents a picture of Wolfe at his death that is less romantic and decidedly less heroic than the familiar one.

Only at the very end, in an "Afterword," is the reader told that the memoir and the soldier himself are entirely fictional. The essays, Schama then explains, are "historical novellas," rather than history proper, "works of the imagination, not scholarship," containing characters, scenes, and passages that are "pure inventions"—although based, he adds, on what the documents "suggest." Since this book, like Schama's earlier one on the French Revolution, is not burdened with footnotes, we have no way of knowing where the documents end and the inventions start. Indeed, it is not until this point, two hundred and fifty pages after the conclusion of the essay on Wolfe, that we discover that some of the most dramatic parts of the narrative, which carry the weight of his thesis and which have all the earmarks of authenticity, are completely fictional. (When this essay was published earlier in the English journal *Granta*, it was without the afterword and thus without any intimation that it was anything but conventional history.)

A similar caveat, this time in the introduction rather than afterword, appears in the much admired book *Black Odyssey*, by another eminent Harvard

professor, Nathan Huggins. The reader is forewarned that the style is "evocative and impressionistic" rather than "descriptive and analytical," and that the approach to the subject risks "some distortion." Instead of a conventional historical account of the African background, Huggins explains that he presents "a model, something of an archetype," not an actual village but an "ideal African social context." The reality, he admits, is far more diverse and complicated, the actual "African experience" covering two centuries and hundreds of peoples with widely differing political, social, economic, even sexual characteristics. That disclaimer, however, is soon forgotten as the reader is immersed in the dramatic (and surely idealized) portrait of a natural, stable, harmonious community that was to be violently destroyed by the slave trade. In the absence of footnotes (or such mundane facts as dates, statistics, or documents), and in the "evocative and impressionistic" style that Huggins aptly describes, the reader is apt to accept his claim that this "model" has an "essential validity," a psychological "truth," which transcends the historical reality. Even the professional historian, knowing that the "archetype" does not, in fact, correspond to the reality, is moved by that portrait. "There are more erudite illustrations of the slave trade than Huggins's," one reviewer observes, "but few which make the individual's predicament so palpable."

These examples have deliberately been chosen from highly respected historians who are not thought of, and do not think of themselves, as postmodernists. (Schama has explicitly dissociated himself from this school.) But they share a view of the historical enterprise that effectively deconstructs or "problematizes" history by obscuring the distinction between fact and fiction, thus creating what the postmodernist regards as a higher form of history, "historiographic metafiction."

Many historians who shy away from any suggestion of fictional or even "metafictional" history welcome the invitation to be "inventive," "imaginative," "creative"—words bandied about so frequently in the profession today that one almost does not notice them or consider their implication. Instead of "recreating" the past, historians are now told to "create" it; instead of "reconstructing" the past, to "construct" it. Where once we were exhorted to be accurate and rigorous, we are now urged to be imaginative and inventive. Where relativism was once taken to mean that we could only hope to attain probable, not absolute, truth, today it is taken as license for any possible or plausible interpretation. Formerly, when historians invoked the idea of imagination, they meant the exercise of imagination required to transcend the present and immerse oneself in the past. This was, as J. H.

Plumb noted, the genius of the great nineteenth-century historians: "Empathy, imagination, the attempt to place oneself in an historic situation and into an historic character without pre-judgment." For the postmodernist it means exactly the opposite: the imagination to create a past in the image of the present and in accord with the judgment of the historian.

Schama cites Macaulay's view of historical imagination to support his own excursions into fictional history. History, Macaulay writes, is a "debatable land" governed by two hostile powers: "Instead of being equally shared between its two rulers, the Reason and the Imagination, it falls alternately under the sole and absolute dominion of each. It is sometimes fiction. It is sometimes theory." But Schama does not quote the rest of this passage, in which Macaulay places significant limitations on the dominion of the imagination.

A perfect historian must possess an imagination sufficiently powerful to make his narrative affecting and picturesque. Yet he must control it so absolutely as to content himself with the materials which he finds, and to refrain from supplying deficiencies by additions of his own. He must be a profound and ingenious reasoner. Yet he must possess sufficient self-command to abstain from casting his facts in the mould of his hypothesis.

Nor does Schama quote another passage in the same essay describing the "art of historical narration" as the ability to affect the reader's imagination "without indulging in the license of invention"; nor, later still, Macaulay's comparison of the historian to the dramatist, "with one obvious distinction": "The dramatist creates: the historian only disposes."

It may be said that postmodernist history is of little importance in the profession at large, that it is confined to a self-described "vanguard" which has few disciples in theory and fewer still in practice. In sheer numbers, this may be the case, although it is difficult to make such a quantitative calculation. But the question of influence is not determined by numbers, as anyone who has followed the fortunes of Marxism in the academy and in the culture at large is acutely aware; Marxism in the thirties was far more influential than the number of avowed Marxists would suggest. And so it is with any intellectual or cultural movement. The word "vanguard" itself is deceptive. In its original military meaning, it referred to the advance troops of an army, and the efficacy of the vanguard was assumed to depend on the size and strength of the troops behind it. In its present sense, a vanguard may exist and thrive, and profoundly affect the

culture, without any army—with “fellow-travelers” in place of troops. It is a long time since anyone has been foolish enough to ask, “How many divisions has the Pope?”

Postmodernism is far less prevalent among historians than among literary critics, although even in history it exercises a disproportionate influence because it tends to attract a disproportionate number of the best and the brightest in the profession, especially in the younger generation. How can bright, ambitious young historians resist the new, especially when it has the sanction of some of their most prestigious elders and is already so well ensconced in the profession? And how can they resist the new when it carries with it not only the promise of advancement but the allure of creativity, imagination, inventiveness? And not only creativity but liberation from the tedium and rigor of the old “discipline” of history?

This last is a matter of more than passing importance, both in explaining the attraction of postmodernist history and its influence. In the old benighted days, an aspirant in the profession was required to go through the mandatory initiation rite known as “Historical Methodology.” That course, once the centerpiece of the graduate program, is now obsolete because the idea of any “methodology,” let alone a uniform, obligatory one, is regarded as arbitrary and oppressive. The absence of such a course, the lack of any training in what used to be confidently called the “canon of evidence”—even more, the disrespect for any such canon—is itself a fact of considerable importance in the training (or non-training) of young historians. It has even affected some older historians, including some traditional ones, who now feel sufficiently liberated to dispense with such impediments to creativity as footnotes. This methodological liberation has done more to transform the profession, making it less of a “discipline” and more of an impressionistic “art,” than any conscious conversion to postmodernism. It may, indeed, prove to be the decisive victory of postmodernism.

Finally, there are the politically liberating aspects of postmodernism that make it so seductive. Some Marxists, neo-Marxists, and old-fashioned radicals are suspicious of postmodernism as apolitical, passive, and thus essentially conservative. Jürgen Habermas is not alone in characterizing Foucault as “neoconservative” because his “theoretical gestures” offer no positive alternative to capitalism. “Since it commits you to affirming nothing,” Terry Eagleton says of postmodernism, “it is as injurious as blank ammunition.” But he goes on to exempt some leading postmodernists from that stricture, including Derrida himself. “Derrida is clearly out to do more than develop new techniques of reading: deconstruction is for

him an ultimately *political* practice, an attempt to dismantle the logic by which a particular system of thought, and behind that a whole system of political structures and social institutions, maintains its force.” Similarly, Foucault, in spite of his own criticisms of Marxism, is said by one of his admirers to be “continuing the work of the Western Marxists by other means.” Other commentators see postmodernism as peculiarly congenial to the newer forms of radicalism. Peter Stearns, editor of the *Journal of Social History*, notes the connection between postmodernism and the “currently fashionable protest ideologies of the academic world”—anti-racism, anti-sexism, environmentalism. “Postmodernists,” he observes, “are clearly spurred by a desire to find new intellectual bases for radicalism, given the troubles of liberalism and socialism.”

The radicalism of postmodernism is, in fact, far more radical than either Marxism or the new modish ideologies, both of which share a commitment to Enlightenment principles and discourse, appealing to reason, truth, justice, morality, reality. Postmodernism repudiates both the values and the rhetoric of the Enlightenment—that is, of modernity. In rejecting the “discipline” of knowledge and rationality, postmodernism also rejects the “discipline” of society and authority. And in denying any reality apart from language, it subverts the structure of society together with the structure of language. The principle of indeterminacy is an invitation to creation *ex nihilo*. It presents the historian with a *tabula rasa* on which he may inscribe whatever he chooses, including the most deterministic of theories. This is why the indeterminacy of postmodernism lends itself to the determinacy of the race/class/gender trinity. By deconstructing the “text” of the past, new histories can be created in accord with the race/class/gender dispositions of their creators.

The political potential of postmodernism has been seized most enthusiastically and imaginatively by feminist historians, who find the old Marxism and even some forms of the new radicalism unresponsive to their concerns. It is no accident that some of the leading postmodernists in America today are feminists, and that postmodernism figures so prominently in feminist literature. Joan Wallach Scott explains the political relationship between the two:

A more radical feminist politics (and a more radical feminist history) seems to me to require a more radical epistemology. Precisely because it addresses questions of epistemology, relativizes the status of all knowledge, links knowledge and power, and theorizes these in terms of the operations of difference, I think poststructuralism (or at least some of the

approaches generally associated with Michel Foucault and Jacques Derrida) can offer feminism a powerful analytic perspective.

Feminist history is profoundly subversive not only of traditional history but of earlier varieties of women's history. It belittles the kind of women's history that focuses on the experiences of women in particular events or periods. It even repudiates the "mainstreaming" of women's history into general history—the "add-women-and-stir" recipe, as it is now scornfully called. The new feminist history, unlike the old women's history, demands that all of history be rewritten from a "consciously feminist stance," a "feminist perspective"—the perspective of the feminist historian rather than of the women who are the ostensible subjects of history. It is because of this ambitious goal that feminist history requires, as Scott says, a "radical epistemology" that defines all of history as essentially, irredeemably political. If conventional history is an instrument of patriarchal power, feminist history, by the same token, must be an instrument for feminist power.

Some feminists have been remarkably candid in describing their intentions and practices. "We are all engaged in writing a kind of propaganda," Ellen Somekawa and Elizabeth A. Smith explain in a recent essay. "Our stories are inspired by what could be called a worldview, but what we would call politics." Since there is no objective basis for one story rather than another, the only grounds for judging one better than another are "its persuasiveness, its political utility, and its political sincerity." This presents feminists with something of a dilemma, for political expediency might be best served by concealing or denying the theory upon which their history is based. Any history that "problematize[s] the past, reality, and the truth" makes for difficult reading and therefore reduces its effectiveness; moreover, it might be more compelling if it assumes the "mantle of objectivity" and "mythologizes" its own story by presenting it as true. Somekawa and Smith sympathize with those who resort to this stratagem, but they themselves resist it. A truly radical history, they insist, requires nothing less than a totally demythologized history.

Thus it is that the "poetics" of history becomes the "politics" of history. Postmodernism, even more overtly than Marxism, makes of history—the writing of history—an instrument in the struggle for power. If nothing is true and everything is rhetorical, and rhetoric itself reflects the structure of power, then the historian, like the proletariat of old, is the permanent bearer of the "class" war.

What is sauce for the goose. . . . If the feminist historian can and should write history from her perspective and for her political purpose, why

should the black historian not do the same—even if such a history might "marginalize" women? And why not the working-class historian, who might marginalize both women and blacks? (Feminist historians have criticized E. P. Thompson and other social historians on just this ground.) And why not the homosexual historian, who might marginalize heterosexuals? For that matter, why not the traditional dead-white-male (or even live-white-male) historian, who might marginalize (who has been accused of marginalizing) all other species?

If "Everyman his own historian" must now be rendered "Everyman/woman his/her own historian"—or, as some feminists would have it, "Everywomyn her own herstorian"—why not "Every Black/White/Hispanic/Asian/Native American . . ."? Or "Every Christian/Jew/Catholic/Protestant/Muslim/Hindu/secularist/atheist . . ."? Or "Every heterosexual/homosexual/bisexual/androgynous/polymorphous/misogamous/misogynous . . ."? And so on, through all the ethnic, racial, religious, sexual, national, ideological, and other characteristics that distinguish people? This sounds like a *reductio ad absurdum*, but it is little more than is already being affirmed in the name of "multiculturalism."

Multiculturalism has the obvious effect of politicizing history. But its more pernicious effect is to demean and dehumanize the subjects of history. To deny the generic "man" is to deny the common humanity of both sexes—and, by implication, the common humanity of all racial, social, religious, and ethnic groups. It is also to deny the common history they were once presumed to share. Traditional historians, even many radical historians, are troubled by the prospect of a history so pluralized and fragmented that it lacks all coherence and focus, all sense of continuity, indeed, all meaning.

From a postmodernist perspective, this is all to the good, for it destroys the "totalizing," "universalizing," "logocentric," "phallogocentric" history that is said to be the great evil of modernity. Postmodernism proposes instead to privilege "aporia"—difference, discontinuity, disparity, contradiction, discord, indeterminacy, ambiguity, irony, paradox, perversity, opacity, obscurity, chaos. "We require a history," Hayden White explains, "that will educate us to discontinuity more than ever before; for discontinuity, disruption, and chaos is our lot." The modernist accuses the postmodernist of bringing us to the abyss of nihilism. The postmodernist proudly, happily accepts that charge. Paul de Man has been described by his admirers as "the only man who ever looked into the abyss and came away smiling." In view of the recent revelations about de Man's early Nazi and anti-Semitic writings, this is a chilling tribute.

What is the future of postmodernism? Is it just another of those intellectual fashions that periodically seize the imagination of a bored and fickle academia? Whatever happened to existentialism? In France, the source of most of these fashions, deconstruction is already passé. Can it much longer survive here? Given the volatility of intellectual and academic life, it is hard not to anticipate a post-postmodernism. The question is, what form will that take?

In history, as in literature and philosophy, there may well be—there almost certainly will be—a disaffection with postmodernism, if only because the appeal of novelty will wear off. The “herd of independent minds,” in Harold Rosenberg’s brilliant phrase, will find some other brave, new cause to rally around. Out of boredom, careerism (the search for ways to distinguish and thus advance oneself in the profession), and sheer bloody-mindedness (the desire to *épater* one’s elders), the young will rebel, and the vanguard of today will find itself an aging rearguard—much as the “new history” of an earlier generation (social history) has been displaced by this newer history. What is not at all clear, however, is the nature of the rebellion—whether it will be a counterrevolution leading to a restoration (or partial restoration) of an older mode of history, or whether it will usher in a still newer mode, the configuration of which we cannot begin to imagine.

One might think that a counterrevolution is already under way in the form of the “New Historicism,” the latest version of Marxism. But while some of the members of this school (Frederic Jameson and Terry Eagleton, most notably) criticize postmodernism for being insufficiently revolutionary and overly esthetic, they are also attracted to those aspects of it that are truly subversive. Thus Eagleton praises feminist postmodernism not only for insisting that women have equal power and status with men, but for questioning the legitimacy of *all* power and status. “It is not that the world will be better off with more female participation in it; it is that without the ‘feminization’ of human history, the world is unlikely to survive.” In the common cause of radicalism, structuralists and poststructuralists, new historicists and feminists, have been able to overlook whatever logical incompatibilities there may be in their theories. (This presents no great problem for deconstructionists, who have an infinite tolerance for contradiction and a great contempt for “linear” logic.) Like the communists and socialists of an earlier generation, they have formed a “popular front,” marching separately to a common goal. Thus the new historicism, so far from presenting a clear, unambiguous alternative to postmodernism, has become an ally of it, if a somewhat uneasy one.

It is a cliché that no counterrevolution is ever quite that, that the *status quo ante* is never fully restored. In the case of history, what will stand in the way of a full restoration of traditional history is not, as one might think, ideology; one can foresee a desire to return to a more objective and integrated, less divisive and self-interested history. What will be more difficult to restore is the methodology that is at the heart of that history. A generation of historians (by now, several generations as these are reckoned in academia) lack any training in that methodology. They may even lack the discipline—moral as well as professional—required for it. Eagleton speaks of the “laid-back” style of postmodernism. It is “laid-back,” however, not in the sense of being casual, colloquial, commonsensical—on the contrary, it is contrived, abstruse, recondite—but in the sense of ignoring, even deliberately violating, the conventions of logic, consistency, evidence, and documentation. The postmodernist argument is that these are the “totalizing” practices of a totalitarian discipline. But they are also the hard practices of a difficult discipline. Gresham’s law governs history as surely as economics: bad habits drive out good, easy methods drive out hard ones. And there is no doubt that the old history, traditional history, is hard.

Hard—but exciting precisely because it is hard. And that excitement may inspire a new generation of historians. It is more exciting to write true history (or as true as we can make it) than fictional history, else historians would choose to be novelists rather than historians; more exciting to try to rise above our interests and prejudices than to indulge them; more exciting to try to enter the imagination of those remote from us in time and place than to impose our imagination upon them; more exciting to write a coherent narrative while respecting the complexity of historical events than to fragmentize history into disconnected units; more exciting to try to get the facts (without benefit of quotation marks) as right as we can than to deny the very idea of facts; even more exciting to get the footnotes right, if only to show others the visible proof of our labors.

The political theorist William Dunning said that one of the happiest days of his life was when he discovered, by a comparison of handwriting, that Andrew Jackson’s first message to Congress was actually drafted by George Bancroft. “I don’t believe,” he wrote to his wife, “you can form any idea of the pleasure it gives me to have discovered this little historical fact.” Every historian has had this experience—the pleasure of discovering a fact that may appear in the published work in a subordinate clause or footnote, but that, however trivial in itself, validates the entire enterprise, because it is not only new but also true. The postmodernist historian can never have that satisfaction.

Postmodernism entices us with the siren call of liberation and creativity, but it may be an invitation to intellectual and moral suicide. Foucault has hailed the “death of humanist man,” and friends and critics agree that postmodernism is anti-humanistic. By the same token, it is profoundly antihistorical. Hayden White commends the great historians who “interpreted the burden of the historian as a moral charge to free men from the burden of history.” One may think it bizarre to include, as he does, Tocqueville in that company, but one cannot doubt that that is indeed the aim

of postmodernism. To free men from the “burden” of history is to free them from the burden of humanity. Liberationist history, like liberationist theology, is not a new and higher form of the discipline; it is the negation of the discipline.

If we have survived the “death of God” and the “death of man,” we will surely survive the “death of history”—and of truth, reason, morality, society, reality, and all the other verities we used to take for granted and that have now been “problematized.” We will even survive the death of postmodernism. F

The Grand Canyon

From the eastern rim Jorgé throws a rock
into the deep and we hear nothing in return.
An American lady says as she walks away
that it's a nice place to visit and her voice
trails off. And “breathtaking” says
someone else we'll never get to know.

The Japanese teenagers stare solemnly
down while the people from France
speak in interested tones as they point
toward the west then north, south. Our
leaders are not here. We are ungoverned,
listening, needlessly, for the lost rock.

And I think of the old woman who told me
she could never see the joy in staring into
this large hole in the earth. “Give me a casino,”
she affirmed that day, “where losses and wins
are strictly defined, where my feet are secure
and chance answers back as clear as a bell.”

Jorgé puts a quarter into the viewer, moves it
every which way. The old woman is dead and
he is fourteen, seeing a country that's not
quite his, living as if the world were all
Guadalajara, where he was born, trusting,
like home, this lovely and foreign edge.

Barbara Wuest

The Disputed Legacy of Reinhold Niebuhr

Matthew Berke

Besides being the quincentenary of Columbus' voyage, 1992 has also been the centenary of the birth of the American churchman Reinhold Niebuhr (1892-1971). From the 1930s through the 1950s, Niebuhr was regarded by many as a kind of prophet, a public theologian who could explain modern discontents and upheavals in language that was explicitly Christian—or "biblical," as he sometimes put it, acknowledging the common inheritance of Christians and Jews.

One of the most impressive tributes of this centennial was provided by historian Arthur Schlesinger, Jr. Writing in the *New York Times* on the occasion of Niebuhr's birthday, Schlesinger described his old friend as "one of the great Americans of the century." The son of a Midwestern immigrant pastor, Niebuhr rose to become a distinguished professor (at Union Theological Seminary in New York), a tireless lecturer and preacher, and a prodigious writer of books and articles on theology, history, foreign policy, politics, and culture. To an intellectually superficial and blithely secular generation raised on "optimistic convictions of human innocence and perfectability," this politically liberal clergyman spoke compellingly about the reality of evil and sin. Yet the inevitability of human egotism was not used to justify an authoritarian political order; on the contrary, Schlesinger recalls, Niebuhr "persuaded me and many of my contemporaries that [belief in] original sin provides a far stronger foundation for freedom and self-government than illusions about human perfectability." A modicum of justice, Niebuhr held, is best attained through a balance of power between

contending factions or classes within a democratic framework. Schlesinger writes, "Of all his thoughts, I treasure this the most: 'Man's capacity for justice makes democracy possible; but man's inclination to injustice makes democracy necessary.' " And, in a particularly evocative passage, Schlesinger observes:

What gave his activities unity and power was his passionate sense of the tragedy of life, irony, and the fallibility of humans—and his deep conviction of the duty, even in the face of these intractable realities, to be firm in the right as God gives us to see the right. Humility, he believed, must temper, not sever, the nerve of action. Lincoln was his ideal as a statesman because he combined "moral resoluteness about the immediate issues with a religious awareness of another dimension of meaning."

As for Niebuhr's legacy, Schlesinger says that it "is currently a subject of acrid dispute between liberals and conservatives," with both parties claiming Niebuhr as a mentor. This last point is slightly behind the times, since the "acrid disputes" of the seventies and eighties have become moot issues in the nineties: the Cold War is over and the imminent threat of nuclear Armageddon removed; liberation theology as a political enthusiasm is as dead as Christian temperance; the domestic issues of race and poverty remain, but they are no longer discussed in simple liberal/conservative terms, while at the same time new issues of oppression and liberation have arisen. Of course, the past always lives in the present, and the final Niebuhrian verdict on the issues of the age just past will largely

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determine how his "Christian realism" is applied to current debates.

In the disputes over Niebuhr's legacy during the past two decades, both the conservative and liberal Niebuhrians were able to find a measure of confirmation in the Master's writings. In the end, though, judgment of Niebuhr's legacy must be decided in the light of historical events. We cannot bring Niebuhr back to see which faction among his disciples he would bless; but between the alternate strains in his thought we can, in light of recent events, say which strain proved to be most prescient, prophetic, and wise. In short, the decisive question is not, "Who was right with Reinie?"—but rather, "What did Reinie get right?"

The contest for Niebuhr's legacy was occasioned by—and tended to focus on—the controversy over America's role in world affairs, in particular the country's Cold War policies reconsidered in light of the Vietnam War.

The evolution of Niebuhr's own thought on America's international role passed through several stages that are by now familiar to students of his work. During World War I, Niebuhr, as a young pastor of German descent, was an ardently patriotic supporter of America's war effort; but in the general disillusionment that followed the Treaty of Versailles he embraced, albeit half-heartedly, the fashionable pacifism of the day. ("This is as good a time as any to make up my mind that I am done with the war business," he wrote in his diary in 1923.) By the late thirties, however, with Hitler menacing the world, Niebuhr shocked the largely pacifist/neutralist American church with his strong advocacy of intervention—in order, he said, "to prevent the triumph of an intolerable tyranny."

Niebuhr's position at the outset of the Cold War was one of moral equivalence between the superpowers, but a series of naked power grabs by Soviet Russia quickly persuaded him that "we do face once more the distinction between relative justice and tyranny." As in the years leading up to World War II, Niebuhr again subordinated his reformer's misgivings about American institutions and purposes, saying that "we are embattled with a foe who embodies all the evils of a demonic religion." Communism, he explained, is "an organized evil which spreads terror and cruelty throughout the world and confronts us everywhere with faceless men who are immune to every form of moral and political suasion." Given Communism's "monstrous evil," "poison," "malignancy," "demonic" pretension, and "cruel fanaticism," Niebuhr concluded by the late 1940s that "Russian truculence . . . cannot be mitigated by further concessions"; therefore "we must be ready to risk war . . . rather than yield to Russian pressure."

Niebuhr's hard-line statements and rhetoric did

not, however, reflect a crude anti-Communism or mindless patriotism. He understood that Communism was a perverse form of Western idealism, that it possessed (wrongly but understandably) a measure of prestige among desperate people and reform-minded intellectuals, and that its dangerously utopian solutions to social ills (real and exaggerated) required the free world to wage a political as well as military struggle. A critic of his own society, Niebuhr acknowledged the sinful propensities of all nations and the American/Western democratic complicity in the whole morass of tensions and ancient wrongs that had led to the existing situation.

Moreover, he worried that "we [Americans] are not really good enough for this struggle": too inexperienced in international affairs, too sure of our own innocence and virtue, unprepared for the uses and perils of power. In *The Irony of American History* (1952), his most comprehensive statement on the nation's Cold War responsibility, Niebuhr cautioned that even in the best circumstances "power cannot be wielded without guilt," since "we cannot do good without also doing evil." Thus, he worried, "either we will seek escape from responsibilities which involve unavoidable guilt, or we will be plunged into avoidable guilt by too great confidence in our virtue." Though we might possess a "provisional" moral advantage over our adversaries, that advantage, he said, could be squandered by an arrogant attitude toward our allies, or, in a fit of frustration and self-righteous fury, by a vain attempt at "preventive war" against our adversaries. Though he felt that Communist fanaticism and aggression could be tempered and tamed in the long run, he feared that the American people, accustomed to relatively easy triumphs in domestic affairs and foreign wars, might lack the maturity and patience to bear the insecurity and uncertainty of what John F. Kennedy would later call a "a long twilight struggle, year in and year out," perhaps for decades. Nevertheless, Niebuhr insisted that defensive actions were required, despite all hazards. Along with the diplomat George Kennan and the academic Hans Morgenthau, Niebuhr became one of the key intellectual defenders of America's "containment" policy against the Soviet Union, including the maintenance of a nuclear deterrent. As a founding member of Americans for Democratic Action (ADA) in the 1940s, he firmed up liberal support for a bipartisan foreign policy.

By the 1960s New Left critics and revisionist historians were challenging this consensus account of American policy, finding the Cold War's origins in American, rather than Soviet, aggression. Walter LaFeber, in *America, Russia, and the Cold War* (1967), attributed enormous influence to the likes of Reinhold Niebuhr in fashioning and

defending the policies of the Cold War. Theologian John M. Swomley, in *American Empire: The Political Ethics of Twentieth-Century Conquest* (1970), accused Niebuhr and his Christian realism of having "provided the religious rationale for the military foreign policy that created the contemporary American empire and the policy of global intervention culminating in the war in Vietnam." Christopher Lasch denounced the whole "cult of the hardboiled" with which Niebuhr and the realist school were identified. Though Niebuhr himself had turned against the war by the late 1960s, he was still regarded by doves as a founder of policies that led to Vietnam, whatever their original intent. Religious as well as secular activists now took their cues from revisionist and New Left theoreticians, using Niebuhrian realism as a foil or negative counterpoint to their ideologically "correct" radicalisms—a trend that has continued to the present time in many seminars and religion departments across the country.

Some of Niebuhr's old colleagues and students followed the leftward tide in varying degrees, without, however, disowning their mentor; indeed, they argued that he had been leaning in that direction for some time. These left-liberal Niebuhrians—Professor Schlesinger, John C. Bennett, Robert McAfee Brown, Ronald Stone, Richard Wightman Fox, to name just a few—conceded that Niebuhr's thought had contributed to the fiasco of the Cold War and Vietnam. But they were pleased by Niebuhr's accusations that Vietnam was "a bloody, costly, and futile war" being fought under the rubric of defending democracy in a country where democracy was unsustainable. For such an act of hubris we were paying a bitter price in human suffering and domestic strife. Thus while the left-liberals acknowledged that Niebuhr never renounced containment altogether, they were pleased by his growing reluctance to approve of specific interventions (as in the Dominican Republic in 1965), and by his criticisms of the war, which widened into a larger indictment of American foreign policy and culture. As Richard Fox put it: "He was summoning up vestiges of the anti-establishment militance he had only rarely expressed since the mid-1930s."

Besides, some of the left-liberal Niebuhrians said, the Communism that Niebuhr had denounced in such strident terms had been the Communism of Stalin, repressive to a totalitarian extent internally and dynamically aggressive in its external relations with other countries. Even here, Arthur Schlesinger argued, Niebuhr "went too far in postulating a radical, monolithic, invariant totalitarian essence, immune to human incompetence and to historical change." Furthermore, he "underestimated the extent to which the Soviet Union [in the early Cold War period] was acting on defensive grounds." In

any event, as the Cold War dragged on, Niebuhr did at least speculate about the possibility of an early thaw in superpower relations, and—as if to confirm his left-liberal disciples—he saw the Soviets as being capable of negotiating mutually beneficial agreements with America and the West.

According to Richard Fox, while Niebuhr "had regarded nuclear deterrence with a certain equanimity" in the 1950s, the Berlin crisis of 1961 awakened him to the real danger and possibility of nuclear war. Thus Niebuhr came to speak of the U.S. and USSR as "partners" in preventing a nuclear holocaust, insisting (like nuclear "freeze" proponents of the early eighties) that we needed to "take some risks for peace comparable to our ever more dangerous risks in the game of deterrence," even if it meant dropping an "unrealistic . . . insistence on foolproof inspection." Furthermore, Fox and others pointed out, Niebuhr began to advocate a mild form of unilateralism: i.e., that America should renounce a first use of nuclear weapons, since even a victory won by such means would load an open, democratic society with oppressive, unendurable guilt. Leftists refuted conservatives who invoked Niebuhr's name as a Cold War liberal disdainful of neutralism and moral equivalence between the superpowers, citing one of Niebuhr's last statements on this matter, written eighteen months before his death (and published in *Christian Century*, December 31, 1969):

I must now ruefully change that decade-ago opinion of mine in regard to [theologian Karl] Barth's neutralism. While I do not share his sneer at the "fleshpots of Germany and America," I must admit that our wealth makes our religious anti-Communism particularly odious. Perhaps there is not so much to choose between Communist and anti-Communist fanaticism, particularly when the latter, combined with our wealth, has caused us to stumble into the most pointless, costly, and bloody war in our history.

This position was not entirely an aberrant *volte-face*, the left-liberal Niebuhrians argued, because Christian realism was never a fixed system but rather a dynamic one open to, indeed thriving upon, change and growth. Niebuhr, they said, was always dissatisfied with his previous thought, always revising and refining it in light of new facts and arguments. Once upon a time Soviet Communism was seen as the major threat to justice and world peace, but, according to Arthur Schlesinger: "As the Cold War developed, Niebuhr grew increasingly alarmed over the delusions generated by excessive American power." Thus the nation had forfeited

the provisional, and always tenuous, superiority that, for Niebuhr, had initially justified our Cold War policies. Conservative and neoconservative Niebuhrians who recalled Niebuhr's anti-Communist writings and hard-line foreign policy statements were accused of "fossilizing" the Reinhold Niebuhr of the forties and fifties, ignoring or minimizing his turn to the left in the late sixties. In effect, the left-liberals said, the right had Niebuhrianism but the left had Niebuhr himself—and the living tradition of Christian realism.

Niebuhr's hard-line disciples—Cold War liberals who, willy-nilly, had to accept the conservative or neoconservative label—were distressed by all this. One neocon Niebuhrian, Paul Ramsey, famously lamented that in the political climate of the 1960s "even Reinhold Niebuhr signs petitions and editorials as if Reinhold Niebuhr never existed." Nevertheless, the neoconservative disciples continued to invoke Niebuhr's memory and to draw from his vast store of anti-Communist writings and hard-line foreign policy statements. They had on their side the better part of Niebuhr's corpus: in weight, words, and—they were certain—wisdom. Throughout the 1960s, Niebuhr's writings still occasionally displayed flashes of the anti-Communist, Cold War "realism" characteristic of earlier writings; but now they alternated (incomprehensibly to many readers) with more leftish assessments. Some hard-line Niebuhrians no doubt thought (but did not say publicly) that Niebuhr's neutralist pronouncements were cranky, unbalanced, and out of touch with reality, products of the advanced physical illness and morbid temper of his final years. Michael Novak, the most persistent proponent of a neoconservative Niebuhr, may have been hinting at this view when, in 1972, a year after Niebuhr's death, he opined: "It would have been marvelous to have had him at the height of his powers during the turbulence of the 1960s; instead, he could only be an occasional and inevitably distant observer."

But beyond attempts to minimize Niebuhr's last musings, the neocon Niebuhrians could turn at least one of the left-liberals' potent arguments against them: Niebuhr's perpetual dissatisfaction and revision of his own thought as events unfolded. Thus, if Niebuhr had moved to the left in the sixties—it could be argued—he probably would have readjusted his views once again in the seventies and eighties, having seen the terrible aftermath of the Vietnam War: totalitarian dictatorship and oppressive poverty, hoards of refugees and "boat people," near-genocide in Cambodia under the Khmer Rouge Communists. Beyond its direct consequences for Southeast Asia, the Vietnam War also resulted in an American loss of nerve and purpose, allowing, for a time, considerable reign

to revolutionary movements and Communist regimes throughout the third world. Moreover, while détente muted the hostile rhetoric between East and West—a development that Niebuhr in the 1960s thought would help reduce superpower tensions—had he lived longer, with his intellectual powers intact, it seems certain that he would have confronted the menacing realities belied by treaties and talk of mutual understanding. Under the umbrella of détente the Soviets invaded Afghanistan and began their remorseless accumulation of nuclear weapons in an effort to surpass the U.S. In the meantime America froze or cut back on nuclear as well as conventional forces; it even made unilateral concessions, such as foregoing deployment of the neutron bomb and construction of the B-1 Bomber, and living up to an antimissile defense treaty (ABM) that—we now know—the Soviets freely violated.

Whether Niebuhr would have reconsidered his Vietnam opposition in the face of these developments is, of course, an open question. But a persuasive case is made by neocon Niebuhrians that he would have corrected his general drift toward neutrality and moral equivalence, recovering the lapsed policy of containment and deterrence. George Weigel, a neocon Niebuhrian, summarized the situation in the *National Interest* (Fall 1986):

Niebuhr's mature foreign policy commentary was written at a time when there was a present danger of American overconfidence. Niebuhr worried publicly in 1952 whether the moral superiority of democracy, the necessity of meeting the threat of totalitarian ruthlessness, and the impressive weight of American military and economic power would "blind [us] to the ambiguity of the drama of human existence beyond and above the immediate urgencies." The emergence over the past generation of an elite adversary culture in the teaching centers of American life—churches, the media, the academy, popular entertainment—suggests that the present danger is not so much overconfidence as a lack of confidence, which has deteriorated at times into that morally degrading survivalism preached by Drs. Carl Sagan and Helen Caldicott.

Of course it is *possible* that Niebuhr might have sided with the Carl Sagans and Helen Caldicotts, as well as the Arthur Schlesingers and John C. Bennetts. If he had, he would have betrayed all the finest insights of his earlier years—and been woefully mistaken about the course of recent history as well. By the end of the 1980s it was clear to all but the wilfully obtuse that the revival of American and NATO strength, not the false "sweetness and light" of détente and neutralist survivalism, ended

the Cold War on terms consistent with Western ideals of democracy and freedom. The administration of Ronald Reagan renewed opposition to Communist revolutionary movements—in Latin America, Africa, and Asia—thereby imposing terrible burdens on Soviet capabilities. The deployment of the Euromissiles in 1984 prevented a “Finlandization” of Western Europe, while the mere prospect of a “Star Wars” missile defense drove the Soviet military planners to despair. The rearmament of the 1980s, carried out in the teeth of liberal opposition and ridicule, put such strain on the Soviet economy that Kremlin leaders, in order to keep up, were forced to initiate a reform of Communism that, once begun, became uncontrollable, ending finally in a democratic revolution throughout the Communist empire of Eastern and Central Europe. To be sure, internal flaws in the system itself were ultimately responsible for Communism’s collapse—but only, as containment advocates like Niebuhr always predicted, because such internal contradictions could be aggravated by external pressures.

It is a pity that Niebuhr did not live to witness the breathtaking events of recent years, events that vindicate all his predictions and preachments of the forties and fifties. He said that America had to “engage in a patient chess game” with the adversary, containing it until at length it would, of its own internal contradictions, destroy itself. His belief in the untenability of Communism was a consequence of his religious sensibility: he believed that human freedom and human nature in the divine image could not be suppressed and contorted indefinitely, that they would eventually reassert themselves against the remaking and mangling of Communist rulers. Even when there appeared to be no foreseeable change in Russia’s internal governance and feverish aggression, Niebuhr could say, “But we must realize that we are not fated to share the world with the present despotism forever,” that political change was inevitable “in the long run”—provided we kept our nerve and maintained a steady course between war and withdrawal, suicide and surrender. “We . . . know that a world order based upon Communist force and fraud cannot finally prevail; but we are not so certain when and how it will disintegrate.”

Though he publicly expressed doubts about America’s ability to fulfill the mission presented by history, the fact that we did succeed in the end undoubtedly would have thrilled him as it thrilled millions of others who understood the achievement of bringing down the Communist empire without a third world war. Some left-liberal Niebuhrians said that Niebuhr never sought to “win the Cold War” (Ronald Stone) or that he stressed political rather than military means (John C. Bennett). In

reply one may ask, why would he want to wage a Cold War if not to win it? Moreover, while he saw political success as key to Western victory, he knew that diplomacy would be futile unless it was backed up by military power—the “ultima ratio” of all power, as Niebuhr used to put it. The point was to cultivate a readiness and willingness to fight, but also the coolness, skill, and prudence to avoid an all-out war.

Niebuhr often spoke of political solutions as achieving at best a “rough justice.” He saw that in the struggle for justice men never calibrate their use of power perfectly to the threat against them; as fallible human beings they invariably overreact, and as sinners they often equate their own partial vision of the good with perfect goodness, covertly insinuating their own pride and selfishness under the cover of a just cause. This in part is what Niebuhr meant when he insisted that “we cannot do good without also doing evil,” since legitimate assertions of power are inevitably accompanied by illegitimate accentuations of that power. If anything is to be conceded to left-liberal Niebuhrians it is that Niebuhr might have been disappointed that America did not somehow accomplish this world-historical victory with greater nobility and constancy, less meanness and extremism. Rough justice should have been less rough.

What would Niebuhr have said about the Reagan administration? One can easily imagine that he would have been rankled by many Reagan policies and pronouncements—perhaps ridiculing Reagan as unsophisticated, complacent, and self-righteous. Yet Niebuhr always had a great capacity to distinguish between a politician’s personal imperfections and his creative historical role. (Students of Niebuhr’s thought will recall his retroactive endorsement, by 1940, of Franklin Roosevelt and the New Deal, and the repudiation of his own earlier radicalism.) It is difficult to imagine him failing to appreciate Reagan’s achievement in rallying American and Western morale and energy after a hiatus from containment during the post-Vietnam “malaise” of the seventies. The recently liberated peoples of Central and Eastern Europe certainly did not snobbily dismiss the President’s rhetoric about an “evil empire,” but, even before Communism’s final collapse, savored it as a light of truth in their darkness and an anticipation of future freedom.

Earlier this year even the liberal *Christian Century*, while not praising the Reagan administration for its achievements, wondered whether the Western churches need to repent for their complicity with Communist regimes and state-controlled churches, for their failure to provide witness and support to Christians behind the Iron Curtain. Is it conceivable that Niebuhr would have lagged behind left-liberal

churchmen—and secular liberals for that matter—in assessing the true situation of freedom and oppression, East and West? Whatever suggestions of moral equivalence he may have fallen into at the end of his life, Niebuhr's words, written during World War II, provide a permanent reproach to moral equivalence and neutralism:

We do not find it particularly impressive to celebrate one's sensitive conscience by enlarging upon all the well-known evils of our Western world and equating them with the evils of the totalitarian systems. It is just as important for Christians to be discriminating in their judgments, as for them to recognize the element of sin in all human endeavors.

And while Niebuhr could pass severe judgment on American society, he had a sense of providence in which our fulfillment of high purposes did not necessarily wait upon the elimination of all our vices—self-righteousness and false innocence made all the more insufferable by gross materialism and commercialism, love of comfort, infatuation with technology, cultural shallowness and frivolity, and a tendency to national isolationism and irresponsibility. In 1955 Niebuhr wrote:

It is probably idle to hope for the reversal of so strong a cultural trend as our preoccupation with technics. The best we can hope for is

that the wealth so acquired will be dedicated to the task of giving strength to the free community of nations. If we could say, "God be thanked who matched us with this hour"; if we could be thrilled with our historic opportunities and cease to regret our burdens as involving high taxes; and if we could realize that our burdens are an opportunity to make our wealth sufferable to our conscience and tolerable to our friends—then we would redeem even that part of our culture which our critics may deem least honorable.

Despite the odd intellectual turns of his final years, what Niebuhr will be remembered for, what he is vindicated in—in sum, what will be his legacy—is the insistence that in desperate circumstances even sinful men and nations "must take . . . morally hazardous actions." They must be ready to "cover themselves with guilt" in order to ward off radical evils, such as Communism, because "the disavowal of the responsibilities of power can involve an individual or nation in even more grievous guilt." Niebuhr always held that in the end it is the knowledge of God's forgiveness that enables men to venture action at all. And he believed, finally, that great historical events, such as the defeat of Nazism and Communism, owe more to divine providence than human virtue. He knew that the agency of the free world was really the instrument of a good greater than itself. □

A New American Compact: Caring about Women, Caring for the Unborn

The following statement appeared as a full-page advertisement in the New York Times during the Democratic Convention this past July.

Over the next months and years, the American people will confront again the question that Lincoln posed at Gettysburg: whether a nation conceived in liberty and dedicated to human equality can long endure. In this generation, the issue pressing that question on our consciences is the issue of abortion.

We who propose the new American compact outlined below are men and women of diverse callings and political perspectives. We are public officials, medical professionals, scholars, and feminists; we are liberals and conservatives; Democrats, Republicans, and Independents; Catholics, Jews, Protestants, and agnostics. We have sought to reflect carefully on the abortion controversy. We are making our reflections public in the hope that they will help all Americans cut through the static of the sound bites and discuss the linked questions of abortion, human dignity, and American freedom with the moral seriousness demanded of citizens of a democratic republic.

For almost twenty years, abortion policy in America has been controlled by the courts. That seems likely to remain the case in the immediate future, even though the recent U.S. Supreme Court decision permits state legislatures to enact some modest regulation of abortion practice. It is to be deeply regretted that the American people have been denied the deliberative role in shaping public policy on this issue that has been played by the citizens of other developed democracies. The American people are capable of serious public moral reflection; the American people are capable of rising above partisanship on a matter of this gravity. Their voice can and must be heard, through the normal procedures of democracy.

For like the practice of slavery, and like the Jim Crow laws of the not-so-distant past, the abortion issue raises the most fundamental questions of justice—questions that cannot be avoided, and that cannot be resolved by judicial fiat. Who belongs to the community of the commonly protected? Whose rights will we acknowledge? Whose human

dignity will we respect? For whose well-being will we, as a people, assume responsibility? Profound issues of personal and public morality are engaged by these questions. Their resolution—and the manner in which they are debated—will determine the kind of society America will be in its third century.

A Question of Boundaries

The first two hundred years of the American Republic tell an unfolding tale of aspiration—and progress—toward the idea of liberty and justice for all. That progress has been rapid in some periods, halting in others; sometimes it has suffered setbacks. But from the early days of the American colonies to our own time, the basic trajectory was consistent and seemingly inexorable. The boundaries of the community of the commonly protected were steadily expanded—and the story of America became the story of an ever more inclusive society. The United States welcomed its immigrants, protected its workers, freed the slaves, enfranchised women, aided the needy, provided social security for the aged, ensured the civil rights of all its citizens, and made public space accessible to the handicapped: all in service to its ideals of justice.

Then, in January 1973, the U.S. Supreme Court, in its *Roe v. Wade* and *Doe v. Bolton* abortion decisions, drastically reversed this pattern of expanding inclusion. In those decisions, seven unelected justices performed the most momentous act of exclusion in our history: they deprived every human being, for the first nine months of his or her life, of the most fundamental human right of all—the right to life.

Let there be no mistake about the impact of the *Roe* and *Doe* decisions: they did not “liberalize” abortion law; they abolished abortion law in all fifty states. Abortion on demand, throughout the full nine months of a pregnancy, for virtually any reason, became public policy in the United States of America. No other developed democracy had, or has, such a permissive abortion regime.

A vast abortion industry, generating some half a billion dollars annually, sprang into existence in the wake of *Roe* and *Doe*. Twenty-five million

abortions have been performed in the United States since 1973. Over one-and-a-half million were performed in the past year alone. More than 40 percent of these were obtained by women who had already had one or more abortions. But less than 5 percent of the abortions performed today are performed because of rape, incest, threat to maternal health, or grave fetal deformity. Abortion after *Roe* and *Doe* has become, in the overwhelming majority of cases, a matter of *ex post facto* contraception.

That is not the kind of America that expresses the abiding decency and compassion of our people. It is long past time, we believe, to reconstitute the story of America as a story of inclusion and protection.

Without a Doubt, a Human Life

Those who approve of our current abortion regime sometimes claim that the child in the womb is simply an undifferentiated mass of tissue, an appendage to a woman's body. But modern embryology and fetology exploded such pseudoscience long before *Roe*. Today, the sonogram has given us a veritable window into the womb and has enabled us to observe, in detail, the complex life of the child prior to birth.

From the beginning, each human embryo has its own unique genetic identity. Three-and-a-half weeks after conception, its heart starts beating. At six weeks, brain activity can be detected. At the end of two months the limbs, fingers, and toes are complete. By three months, the baby is quite active, forming fists, bending arms, and curling toes. At four months, vocal cords, eye lashes, teeth buds, fingernails, and toenails are all present. By five months, the baby is sucking its thumb, punching, kicking, and going through the motions of crying. By six months, it responds to light and sound and can recognize its mother's voice.

Advocates of unrestricted abortion do not want the public to focus on these undeniable facts of fetal development, but the facts cannot be ignored. They make plain that abortion is a violent act, not against "potential life," but against a living, growing human being—a life with potential.

Defending Women's Rights

Abortion is defended today as a means of ensuring the equality and independence of women, and as a solution to the problems of single parenting, child abuse, and the feminization of poverty. The sad truth is that the abortion license has proven to be a disaster for women, children, and families—and, thus, for American society.

We have had virtually unlimited access to abortion for nearly twenty years. Yet during that same period, more and more women and children have slipped into poverty. The insistence by supporters

of abortion on demand that only "wanted children" be allowed to be born has not improved our infant mortality rates, which have remained among the worst in the industrialized world; nor has it helped us cope effectively with the incidence of child abuse, the frequency and severity of which have increased dramatically during this time.

Unfettered access to abortion on demand has addressed none of women's true needs; nor has it brought dignity to women. It has, in fact, done precisely the opposite. It has encouraged irresponsible or predatory men, who find abortion a convenient justification for their lack of commitment, and has vastly expanded the exploitation of women by the abortion industry. When the U.S. Supreme Court handed down *Roe v. Wade*, it did not even remotely envision the surgical "assembly line," commercialization, and exploitation which thousands of women say characterize their experiences with an abortion industry intent on maximizing profits. While apologists for abortion on demand raise the specter of "back alley abortions" in response to virtually any proposed regulation of the abortion industry, the truth is that twenty years of abortion on demand have not eliminated this tragic outcome. Women and young girls still die and are injured by *legally* performed abortions.

We know, now, what happens when society makes the destruction of unborn life a matter of "choice." Mutual, responsible family planning is deemphasized. Not only do women experience abortion alone; most relationships fall apart in its aftermath. The abortion license has not brought freedom and security to women. Rather, it has ushered in a new era of irresponsibility toward women and children, one that now begins before birth. It has retarded the quest for securing women's rights by acting as a cheap substitute for real answers to the injustice women experience today.

Beyond the False Dichotomy: A New Compact of Care

The advocates of abortion on demand falsely assume two things: that women must suffer if the lives of unborn children are legally protected; and that women can only attain equality by having the legal option of destroying their innocent offspring in the womb. The cynicism of these assumptions reflects a terrible failure of moral imagination and social responsibility and an appalling lack of respect for women.

We propose a new understanding, one that does not pit mother against child. To establish justice and to promote the general welfare, America does not need the abortion license. What America needs are policies that responsibly protect and advance the interest of mothers *and* their children, both before *and* after birth. Such policies would provide maximum feasible legal protection for the unborn

and maximum feasible care and support for pregnant women, mothers, and children.

Our moral, religious, and political traditions are united in their respect for the dignity of human life. Only in the most extreme circumstances do they permit the taking of life; both our traditions and our law, for example, forbid killing except in case of legitimate self-defense. And thus, analogously, the laws that protected the unborn prior to *Roe* and *Doe* always contained a "life of the mother" exception. Today, fortunately, pregnancy is very rarely a threat to maternal life or health. Nevertheless, a sound abortion policy would provide for the exceptional case of such a threat by permitting medical procedures necessary to save the life of a pregnant woman even when such procedures would inevitably result in death or injury to the unborn child.

The goal, surely, is enactment of the most protective laws possible on behalf of the unborn. We recognize that there are disagreements about what is possible and even desirable here. But that is precisely why, as we argued earlier, the issue should be deliberated and decided by the American people according to the democratic processes of persuasion and legislation.

At the same time, a public policy that more adequately expresses the traditions and convictions of the American people will do more than restore legal protection to the unborn.

It will take seriously the needs of women whose social or economic circumstances might tempt them to seek the abortion "solution." It will recognize our shared responsibility, in public and private settings, to make realistic alternatives to abortion available to such women. It will support women in caring for the children they choose to raise

themselves, and it will help them find homes for those they cannot raise. It will work to provide a decent life for mother and child before and *after* birth.

In sum, we can and we must adopt solutions that reflect the dignity and worth of every human being and that embody understanding of the community's shared responsibility for creating policies that are truly pro-woman *and* pro-child. What we seek are communities and policies that help women to deal with crisis pregnancies by eliminating the crisis, not the child.

Common Choices, Common Destiny

The rhetoric of abortion advocacy contains a truth that abortion advocates often fail to perceive. Abortion is a question of choice. The "choice," though, is not one faced by isolated women exercising private rights. It is a choice faced by all the citizens of this free society. And the choice we make, deliberatively and democratically, will do much to answer two questions: What kind of a people are we? What kind of a people will we be?

If we abandon the principle of respect for human life by making the value of a life depend on whether someone else thinks that life is worthy or wanted, we will become one sort of people.

But there is a better way.

We can choose to reaffirm our respect for human life. We can choose to extend once again the mantle of protection to all members of the human family, including the unborn. We can choose to provide effective care of mothers and children.

And if we make those choices, America will experience a new birth of freedom, bringing with it a renewed spirit of community, compassion, and caring.

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Books In Review

The Unfathomable Mystery of Autism

THERE'S A BOY IN HERE: A MOTHER AND HER SON TELL THE STORY OF HIS EMERGENCE FROM AUTISM. By JUDY BARRON and SEAN BARRON. *Simon & Schuster*. 264 pp. \$20.

Reviewed by Molly Finn

OF ALL THE many states of mind, disorders, and aberrations of man, autism is certainly among the most mysterious. Autistic people give one an uncanny feeling. They provide a vivid reminder that no person can ever fully fathom the mystery of another. Autistic people spend a good part of their energy keeping the world at bay, holding off intimacy in any form. Eye contact is rare. Those who speak usually do so in a monotone. They appear to be unaware of the world around them and either ignore or reject efforts to involve them socially. They tend to shrink from praise. Although they often have exceptionally acute hearing, many autistic children act as if they are deaf.

People meeting an autistic person almost invariably feel that within the strange creature they see there is a hidden person who is intelligent, who can recognize in another what he conceals in himself. I know of many autistic people who are not only selectively aware of their surroundings, but who show evidence of prescience that is unnerving. And in many cases there are islands of self-awareness that sharply illustrate the mystery of this condition.

When my autistic daughter Abby was three years old she grabbed my finger one day and, whining

"cackee, cackee" in a high, distorted voice, pulled me along the hall toward the pantry. Halfway down the hall she stopped. She turned and looked me in the eyes, for perhaps the first time in her life, and said, in a normal tone of voice, "I used to say 'cracker'." Abby is now thirty-six. Nothing like that ever happened again. I have sometimes asked myself since whether it really could have happened. But it did. I can offer no interpretation of this event, nor even speculate on how or why it happened, nor do I believe that anyone else can explain this bizarre and mysterious incident.

MOST PEOPLE who write and talk about autism are reluctant simply to describe the odd behavior and mysterious qualities of autistic people. They feel they must offer an interpretation. Judy Barron, who with her son Sean Barron has written a book about Sean's autism, is someone who can present odd behavior without being compelled to explain it. Her account of the first twenty-five years of Sean's life is rich in detail and admirably free from speculation. The explanation—or I should say "explanation"—is left to Sean, who gives us reasons for his odd behavior, reasons that explain little. While Sean's account of events in his life from inside autism are fascinating, in the end the essential mystery of his condition remains untouched. This is especially tantalizing because Sean is one of the minority of autistic people who have emerged from the most disabling aspects of the disorder into a refined self-awareness and the capacity to love and trust other people.

Judy Barron's chronicle of Sean's life, his autism, and its impact on the entire family is based on journals she kept for years and describes as "a written account of a life we lived but never understood." This is a record of a child, odd and difficult from birth, in the grip of senseless obsessions, controlling the family with rigid rules and prohibitions, tearing through the

house as fast and destructive as a tornado, grunting instead of talking, unresponsive to his parents' loving concern, their urging, coaxing, their vain attempts at discipline, their anger and spanking. Although they make no claims to be heroes, it is also a record of the ceaseless and heroic efforts of Judy and Ron Barron on behalf of their son. The jacket copy asserts that "his family's indomitable and courageous resolve finally released him." There is no direct evidence to support this. It may be that Sean is part of the one-third of autistic people who overcome the most disabling symptoms of their disorder—an improvement that cannot be attributed to any particular treatment. What counts is that his parents were there all along without any guarantee that their actions would ultimately be helpful, and they provided an environment in which Sean could flourish as he emerged from his autistic prison.

The parents of autistic children in the 1960s faced a world that was largely ignorant and uncaring. When Judy Barron described Sean's behavior to her mother the response was, "But all kids do things like that." "I was making her uncomfortable," Judy Barron writes. "I'd begun to feel as if I were building up a case . . . against my own child, an excuse . . . because I couldn't control him. It became clear that although I thought there was something wrong with Sean, my mother thought there was something wrong with me."

THAT MESSAGE followed the Barrons as they sought help from almost a score of professionals including their pediatrician, three psychologists, a speech therapist, a neurologist, and a nutritional therapist. From a psychologist: "How old was Sean when you had your second child?" "Just under two." "You see, [that's] the worst age for the older child." A neurological pediatrician: "'Now, mother,' he began, 'tell me about your son.' 'Excuse me, but I'm not your mother—my name is Judy.' 'I see

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we're having trouble accepting the role of motherhood.' " From a psychiatrist "who was trying to ferret out what we had done to Sean and why. She knew we were the source of his problems, she just didn't know precisely how." At this point, when Sean was twelve, the Barrons decided to put an end to this abuse by professionals and to rely on their own "love, rage, frustration, patience, inventiveness, violence, ignorance, and humor." They also relied on each other for help and support that was always there, and on the belief that their son, flawed and difficult as he was, was a person worth making every effort to save, even when this effort became the center of their lives.

By the mid-seventies it was becoming established that autism is a disorder with a physiological basis. Today, although the jargon has proliferated and professionals still use it to assert their superiority, parents are no longer subjected to the cruel abuse that was almost invariably their lot in the days between the first identification of the disorder in the early forties through the late seventies.

Judy Barron writes with merciless honesty of the frustration and rage Sean's behavior called forth, and of the violence she and her husband were driven to. She also describes endless hours of patient attempts to train, to reason with, to teach, to reorient a child who sometimes seemed to her to have come from another planet. I wouldn't know where to look for an example of faithfulness more impressive than this, or a dedication to a task more openly and modestly undertaken. The Barrons were luckier than most parents of autistic children. Somewhere along the line Sean learned to talk. He went through normal schools with above-average grades, even while his behavior at home remained violent and tyrannical. He graduated from college, drives a car, goes out with girls, has plans to go to graduate school. It was his desire to help other families that made him decide at age twenty-five to

write a book about what it is like to be autistic.

Judy Barron's narrative is interspersed with passages of varying length by Sean, who provides his version of many of the events his mother describes. He adds explanations of his numerous obsessions. As is frequently the case with autistic people, Sean has an unusually complete and accurate memory of his past, and he has analyzed his childhood memories in an attempt to explain behavior that was incomprehensible to other people. Here he "explains" his obsession with light switches:

I loved repetition. Every time I turned on a light I knew what would happen. When I flipped the switch, the light went on. It gave me a wonderful feeling of security because it was exactly the same each time. Sometimes there were two switches on one plate, and I liked those even better; I really liked wondering which light would go on from which switch. Even when I knew, it was thrilling to do it over and over. It was always the same.

People bothered me. I didn't know what they were for or what they would do to me. They were not always the same and I had no security with them at all. Even a person who was always nice to me might be different sometimes. Things didn't fit together to me with people. Even when I saw them a lot, they were still in pieces, and I couldn't connect them to anything.

And another "explanation":

There was a staff person at Beechbrook named Sue Laine whom I absolutely refused to speak to. I pretended that she did not exist. The reason for this was that she was twenty-four years old, and I *hated* the number twenty-four—that

was the number of the school bus at Boardman that was always late. It made me furious! Therefore, I ignored Sue Laine.

HERE AND ELSEWHERE Sean emphasizes the desire for sameness that gave him feelings of security and safety. But that repetition and sameness brought security to Sean is something we could figure out for ourselves. What remains unexplained is why the particulars are the same for so many autistic children who, like Sean, are obsessed with dropping things down holes, with light switches and heat registers, with spinning objects, with license plate numbers and the call letters for radio and TV stations, to name a few. Writing of himself as an eighth grader Sean says, "I was also experiencing a resurgence of my desire to drop things on the floor." The elevated language does nothing to resolve the mystery of why he wanted to drop things on the floor in the first place.

It is moving to follow the progress of Sean's growing self-awareness, the path by which he gradually comes out of his autistic isolation. In an incident eerily similar to the one I related about my daughter, Sean, age nine, looked fixedly at his mother and said, "What kind of job am I ever going to get?" At age twelve, the burden of surviving and learning to conform among the normal teenagers in school was almost intolerable: "I suffered tremendously at school. I was tormented, teased, and jeered at. . . . Since the pressure to conform . . . was so intense—and I could not get myself to follow the norms—I developed my own defenses. One of these was pretending to be a bus."

Nevertheless, Sean started having "corrective conversations" with himself to bolster his awakening desire to change his behavior. When Sean was fourteen his father "reached the end of the road with him." In his extreme frustration and anger, he stopped talking to Sean for eight days. This had a

devastating effect on Sean, but it also brought about a new awareness: "I knew I *had* to change my behavior somehow, no matter how hard it would be."

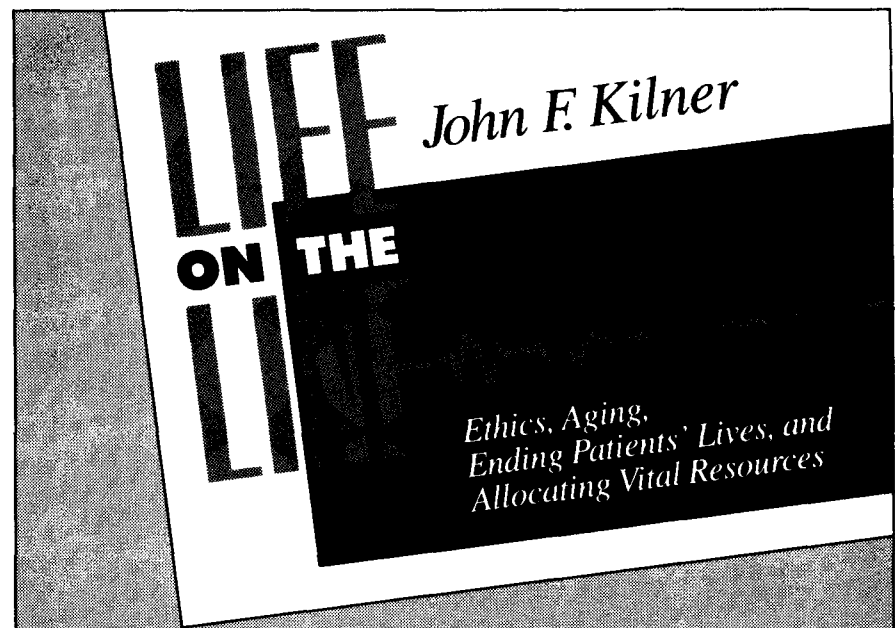
Apart from this one incident, the changes in Sean seem to have been part of a maturation process, not the result of anything specific that was done to him, for him, or by him. When he was fifteen he became aware that people use language to communicate with one another, and he read the entire Random House Dictionary. When Sean was seventeen, he saw a television film about an autistic child and recognized that this was a person like himself. "Could it be that what made me like this was a disease of some kind and that I was not a horrible person after all? . . . 'Mom,' I said, 'I'm autistic too, aren't I?' . . . All at once I knew that I could ask Mom anything. . . . Inside me a dam burst open. I knew I could use words like everybody else."

As is so often the case in books that trace a person's development from childhood through young adulthood, the earlier sections ring truer, seem more accurate than later ones that are suffused with a warmth at least partially reflected from the glow of a happy ending, what Sean refers to as "living some sort of miracle." A slight tinge of sentimentality colors the end of the book. Judy Barron writes, "I was overwhelmed by the logic of his mystifying behavior; so much of it had simply been a desperate attempt to communicate." This may in fact be clear to her, but it is not self-evident. Most of Sean's mystifying behavior still seems to have been directed inward, to comfort himself through repetition or to lend order to a world beyond his comprehension.

MISSING FROM the end sections of the book are the telling details that were so plentiful in the accounts of Sean's childhood. We want to know what Sean is like now, how he acts, how he appears. When Sean tells us of his difficulties in school

we sympathize, but it is only when he adds in a matter-of-fact tone that he helped solve his problems by pretending to be a bus that we realize the extent of his difference from the people around him and the distance he has yet to go.

In the sections of the book describing the "cured" Sean, Judy Barron talks in generalities. While she states that autism does not go away, she tells us little about the part it plays in Sean's life. I study the photo on the book jacket for



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clues, but it is just a snapshot, not a portrait. I have known a number of people who have emerged to some degree from autism, but none to the extent claimed for Sean. If I met Sean, would I recognize him as autistic?

When I read Sean's passages, especially those in the last third of the book, I am struck by the unmistakable similarity between his style and his mother's. What was the nature of their collaboration? How much "editing" did she do? Does the similarity stem from the autistic person's uncommon talent for imitation?

Answers to these questions, offered in the honest spirit of the rest of the book, would have made even more impressive this portrait of a person—no, a family—we have come to know intimately.

Writing of the desolation she experienced on the day Sean left home for a brief stay in a residential school, Judy Barron says, "I remember his birth, our son so full of promise, of unlimited potential." It's what we all feel when our children are born, and in infinitely varied ways we watch them fulfill or not fulfill that promise and we reconcile ourselves to the inevitable limitations on their potential. We learn that they are mysterious even as we are. Amazingly, the experience is essentially the same whether our children are Mozarts, Einsteins, Seans, or Abbys. Equally amazing, no matter who they are we couldn't do much better for them than Ron and Judy Barron did for Sean. He says, "... my parents gave me the greatest gift I could ever receive—they stuck by me and they never gave up on me."

And Judy Barron knows why they did it. Without any assurance that their efforts would ever be rewarded, love impelled them to do what they could to rescue their child. As she says, "No one knows the limits of the human heart and spirit."

The Death of Goddess

IN THE WAKE OF THE GODDESSES: WOMEN, CULTURE, AND THE BIBLICAL TRANSFORMATION OF PAGAN MYTH. By TIKVA FRYMER-KENSKY. Free Press. 292 pp. \$24.95.

Reviewed by Jon D. Levenson

IT HAS BEEN thousands of years since goddesses have been so much on people's minds, at least in the West. What has brought them back with a vengeance (often literally so) is the feminist movement. "Earth-centered, immanent, and immediate, the Goddess of modern neopaganism serves as a refuge from, and counterbalance to, what many consider the remote and punitive god of Western religions," Tikva Frymer-Kensky writes. Her capitalization of "Goddess" but not of "god" speaks volumes about the neopagan theology to which she alludes.

Though she defines herself in part as "a late-twentieth-century postmodern American feminist Jew," Professor Frymer-Kensky's learned discussion of the goddesses of the ancient Near East will not please those whose interest in them is devotional. For one of the singular accomplishments of her research is to show just how distorted the image of the old pagans is in the minds of the new. "The stories about goddesses do not come from any separatist women's cult," she explains, "and are neither female fantasies nor women's mythmaking." Nor is "the existence and power of a goddess . . . [any] indication or guarantee of a high status for human women." "In Assyria," for example, "where Ish-tar was so prominent, women were not." Moreover, Israel cannot be

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blamed for the elimination of the goddess (or, for that matter, credited for it), a process begun long before that nation emerged. One of the fine ironies to which Frymer-Kensky draws attention is that so much avant-garde thinking builds upon "the benighted paganism of the Western imagination" (including biblical polemic), a caricature long abandoned by almost all specialists in the pagan cultures in question. Even more galling to feminist neopagans will be her convincing demonstration that "the 'monotheism' attacked as world-denying, body-deprecating, and woman-hating has little to do with monotheism as it first appeared in biblical Israel."

THE FIRST THIRD of Frymer-Kensky's book is devoted to a discussion of goddesses in the ancient Near East, mostly classical Sumer, where they were particularly prominent. There the goddesses were thought to sponsor the cultural arts and the learned occupations and to serve as the principal keeners in public lamentations. In Sumerian myth, they also played an indispensable role in insuring the proper functioning of nature: "Male and Female appear as the interlocking pieces which combine to open the riches of the universe."

The largest portion of this study deals with the crucial question of the effects of the elimination of the goddess in Israelite monotheism. One effect is the secularization of the arts and sciences, which, deprived of their patroness, are now "humanly conceived and humanly executed." Another and better known effect is the concentration of both the male and the female powers in YHWH, the God of Israel, who is thus "revealed as the master of all the forces of nature." This does not, however, make him androgynous, like the God of many religious liberals today. YHWH, Frymer-Kensky points out, "is a predominantly male god, referred to by the masculine pronoun (never by the feminine)" but "not sexually a male." As she nicely puts it, "God

is not imagined below the waist."

A related effect of the monotheistic revolution is an equalizing of the male and the female natures. "In their strengths and weaknesses, in their goals and strategies, the women of the [Hebrew] Bible do not differ substantially from men," and the Hebrew Bible does not justify the subordination of women to men "by reference to any putative deficiency or inferiority." This stands in sharp distinction to the tendencies in ancient Greek thought to conceive of women as "wild and beastly, and need[ing] to be controlled and dominated by the civilized male." Thus, "as the [Hebrew] Bible presents humanity, gender is a matter of biology and social roles, it is not a question of basic nature or identity." The Hebrew Bible's "homogenization of gender" means that "the differences between male and female are only a question of genitalia." This is not to deny that ancient Israelite women were subordinate to men and, in many respects, institutionally disempowered. It means only that the "ideology [was] at variance with the social reality of people living in a world organized along gender lines."

ANOTHER biblical transformation is the reconception of nature as dependent not upon the sexuality of the gods and goddesses but upon human conduct. Human beings replace the pantheon as "the fulcrum of action." "Ultimately, the well-being of the earth and the people of Israel—or their destruction—is a result of human action," and "God's actions are predictable in fixed response to behavior." This is what Frymer-Kensky means by "radical monotheism," which she equates with "religious humanism."

According to her, it was Hellenization that brought the radical monotheism of the Hebrew Bible to an end, as Jews gradually absorbed the misogyny and gender-segregation characteristic of Athenian society. Along with this went a shift from the Israelite concept of nature as determined by human

beings to the Greek concept of nature "as an unruly female, the very antithesis of civilization." In the Greco-Roman world, Jews (and later Christians as well) replaced the classical Hebraic notion of human action as mediating between God and nature with full-blown mediator figures, thus partially reverting to the pagan vision and severely diminishing the scope of human responsibility. It is these alleged consequences of Hellenization, continued in both the Jewish and the Christian traditions, that Tikva Frymer-Kensky wishes to see reversed. Her book is ultimately a call for a return to radical monothe-

ism, which, she tells us, "has never been truly tried." For first the ancient Israelite social structure and then Hellenization prevented the realization in history of its profoundly egalitarian and anthropocentric impulse.

This is an erudite and challenging book, rich in exegetical insights and only occasionally forced and tendentious in its interpretations. There is, to be sure, the rare feminist excess, such as the dubbing of the Sumerian goddess Inanna as the "cosmic cunt" (are we still expected to be shocked at obscenity?) and the neologistic reflexive pronoun "godself" (puzzling from an author

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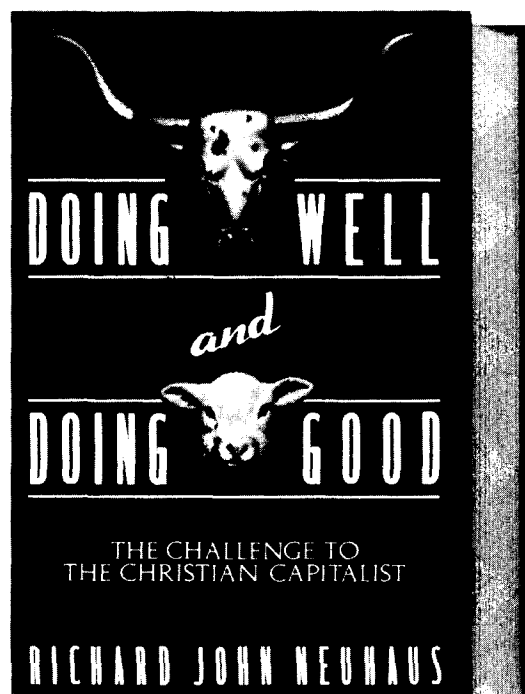
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who acknowledges the Israelite Deity's grammatical masculinity). But this is also an eminently readable book, instructive to scholars yet accessible to the nonspecialist.

A more serious problem has to do with the alleged "homogenization of gender" in the Hebrew Bible. That women are not therein seen as morally and intellectually inferior to men is surely the case, but it is a far cry from this to the view that "the differences between male and female are only a question of genitalia." The genitalia, after all, are part of God's design ("Male and female He created them," Gen. 1:27), and as Frymer-Kensky acknowledges, the Hebrew Bible strictly prohibits cross-dressing and homosexual behavior, the latter because, in her words, "it blurs the distinction between male and female, and this cannot be tolerated in the biblical system." Quite so—and powerful evidence that, contra her view of the matter, the Hebrew Bible does not make a hard distinction between "biology and social roles" on the one hand, and the "basic nature or identity" of human beings on the other. Indeed, that men and women share a common

human nature in no way implies the dispensability or arbitrariness of social roles assigned on the basis of gender. Consider this analogy: Israelites and Gentiles also share a common human nature in the Hebrew Bible (which does not speak of innate racial superiority or inferiority), and yet their duties, privileges, and destinies are not at all the same, and the distinction between the two groups is a matter of high import to most of the authors of the Hebrew Bible. It is not seen as an historical accident.

It must also be noted that Frymer-Kensky's notion of a genderless ideology at variance with social reality is problematic from both theoretical and empirical vantage points. Given her tendency to interpret religion as a projection out of human society, indeed as a mystification of power arrangements, it is hard to know how her underlying theory could allow for such a variance. Moreover, biblical law often endows the disparity in roles that she sees as nothing more than social fact with the status of a sacred norm. Frymer-Kensky seems to assume that the *theology* of a genderless humanity (itself a chimera)

trumps the non-egalitarian *law* of the Hebrew Bible. This kind of move is common among Christian biblical theologians, but highly unusual for a Jew and not easily absorbed by the rabbinic tradition. Similarly, her preference for the Bible over later tradition is likely to find more resonance among Protestants than among her fellow Jews or among Roman Catholics. I might add that there is much to be said for the proposition that the position of women actually *improved* in Late Antiquity (among both Jews and Christians) over against the social reality both reflected and mandated in the Hebrew Bible.

Frymer-Kensky's portrait of the "radical monotheism" of the Hebrew Bible is also deeply flawed. That "the action of Israel determines God's actions in the world" is hardly "the classic Israelite view of human action and divine reactivity." It is at best an unacceptably simplistic statement of the theology of certain pieces of biblical literature, usually Deuteronomic. But even in Deuteronomy, Israel's incomparable status is owing to God's prior and inexplicable election of them and to his gracious pledge to keep faith with his people even when they stray from his commandments. Other currents in the Hebrew Bible are even more resistant to the mechanistic model of deity that Frymer-Kensky mistakes for "the classic Israelite view" of the matter and—oddly, especially after the Holocaust—wishes to revive today. One thinks, for example, of the unyielding theocentrism of the poetic speeches of God in the Book of Job, with their eagerness, by no means uncommon in the Hebrew Bible, to uphold the majesty, sovereignty, and ultimate incomprehensibility of God. This kind of monotheism is so radical that it cannot be equated to any humanism, religious or other.

Frymer-Kensky's concluding shift from historical description and textual analysis (where she usually excels) to a brief advocacy of her version of radical monotheism is jarring. For the projectionist

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view of religion to which she generally seems to subscribe actually undercuts *all* normative discussion (and thus finally refutes itself). If the gods are simply human arrangements "projected onto the divine sphere" (as she describes the connection of male dominance with the recession of the goddesses), then why exempt the God of radical monotheism from the same judgment? If, as she claims, feminism has given us a vision of "a far less gender-ordered universe," then does not the projectionist theory account for the appearance today of precisely the theology that she now espouses?

The Hebrew Bible also has some interesting things to say about people who persist in worshipping what they themselves have created.

The Perils of Historical Positivism

THE UNAUTHORIZED VERSION:
TRUTH AND FICTION IN THE BIBLE.
By ROBIN LANE FOX. *Knopf*. 478
pp. \$27.50.

Reviewed by Gary A. Anderson

OF THE MANY obstacles that the modern world has thrown up in front of Judaism and Christianity, certainly one of the most damaging would be the historical-critical method. This form of intellectual inquiry has transformed radically the manner in which modern persons construe the origins of Scripture and the development of doctrine. Curiously, though, as all modern treatments of this theme have shown, the origins and development of this method were engineered at the hands of religious scholars.

Various explanations could be given for this fact, but two in particular stand out. The first is the somewhat naive but nevertheless widespread expectation among cer-

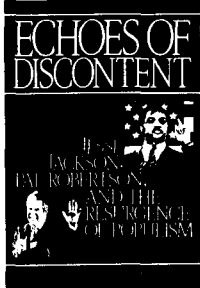
GARY A. ANDERSON teaches in the Department of Religious Studies at the University of Virginia.

tain Protestant scholars that the historical-critical method would lay bare, once and for all, "the plain meaning" of the Christian Scriptures. Alongside this was the more "catholic" approach that saw the Bible as multivalent in meaning and could therefore restrict the damaging results of modern criticism to one particular hermeneutical plane. For centuries Christians (and Jews) operating under this assumption had been pursuing the simple, or historical, meaning of Scripture even though its results often clashed with normative practice and belief.

Though the interest in pursuing nonnormative meanings reached new heights in the medieval period, important precedents for it were to be found in the world of Late Antiquity. Famous allegorists like Origen were willing to point out

surface incongruities within the Scriptures for the purpose of impelling the interpreter to consider another, more spiritual, level of meaning. A perennial problem for such an enterprise as Origen's is how to correlate the historical and the allegorical meanings. But there is another difficulty. If the allegorist is too successful at showing the ahistorical aspect of the scriptural record, then could not the Bible appear as an unfaithful witness of the historical acts of revelation? As the example of Porphyry indicates, this was a matter of no small importance. For when he wrote against the Christian Scriptures, he made ample use of the allegorists' own arguments about the historical credibility of the Bible.

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phyry. For like Porphyry, Fox uses the results of modern biblical criticism to discredit the claims of the Bible to be a witness to divine revelation. Now, the book is a surprisingly insightful and sophisticated account of many of the more important findings of biblical scholarship. Like his ancient counterpart, Fox is a learned man who writes well and in a compelling fashion. However, his book is not an exercise in disinterested inquiry. His entire account is geared to answer one question: is the Bible a credible *historical* witness to what it claims to represent? To no one's surprise a question put in this fashion can yield but one answer: No. From the first to the last page the book sets out to substantiate the unreliability of the Bible as a witness to ancient history. For this purpose, the results of modern criticism serve as an excellent guide.

Nor is Fox one to mince words in his descriptions of historical inaccuracies. In his view the writer of Chronicles is "a splendid liar," and the practice of attributing works to pseudonymous writers, a practice well in evidence throughout the Bible, leads to his assess-

ment that the Bible is a "forger's paradise." Moreover, the predictive narratives in the Bible "are no more accurate than those of a weather forecaster." A better place to turn for an accurate view of the past, according to Fox, is the works of the Greek historians who, "unbiblical as ever, [took] exactness and realism as [their] guiding lights."

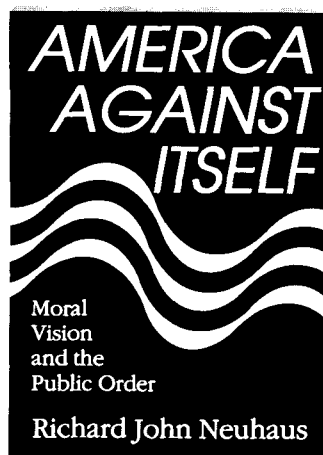
The problem with this type of caricature is that it addresses the question of truth on grounds that are decidedly *un-biblical*. Though prior generations have (somewhat naively) assumed that the Bible's historical details were accurate in every particular, its historical verisimilitude has never been made a criterion of faith nor has the issue received pride of place in the Christian intellectual tradition (excepting the fundamentalist debates of the past century). For the Bible's own claim to truth is tied more to the ongoing interpretive life of this text within a living community of faith than to any claim to be an accurate historical record. Thus, for the believing intellectual, the modern discovery of the historical faults within the Bible, though disturbing and damaging to some degree,

has not resulted in the dismissal of its claim to truth.

INDEED, most recent work on the nature of the Bible's final composition has been interested in demonstrating how the final editors of its books took special care to guide subsequent readers through its apparent maze of inconsistencies. A good example is the recent work on the final shaping of the opening three chapters of Genesis. Fox correctly notes that within these chapters are preserved two stories of the creation that contradict each other in some rather obvious ways. The tendency of modern criticism in the past has been to accentuate these differences and ascribe them to discrete historical circumstances in the life of ancient Israel. For Fox, the very fact of these contradictions and their historically conditioned origins belies any naive belief that the texts could offer anything approaching the concept of "revelation." Yet recent work on these chapters has shown that the latest editor who put the creation account in chapter one in front of the alternative account in chapter two did so in a very sophisticated manner. No doubt this editor realized that he had two different stories in front of him. But by putting the more general account at the beginning and appending the clear reductional formula, "These are the generations of the heaven and earth" (Gen. 2:4a) at the end of the first but in front of the second story, he provided a means of integrating the two. The second story is obviously intended to fill out or "particularize" the first. The result is a composite narrative whose final form results in a meaning unintended by either original source.

To be fair, Fox does address the issue of a nonhistorical hermeneutic. But here his treatment is superficial and naive. He places as a counterpoint to his own historical positivism the radical structuralism and postcritical tendencies of modern literary critics. He correctly rejects much of the nonsense found in the work of these thinkers. But

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the most sophisticated works on modern biblical hermeneutics would not be comfortable with this type of either/or analysis: there is a middle path between the two stark alternatives Fox has presented. The interested reader is well advised to consider the work of Brevard Childs, James Sanders, and Jon Levenson for a more balanced approach.

FINALLY, Fox's book illustrates how strong anti-Jewish tendencies can flourish apart from any religious root. For example, Fox cites the modern insight that the law, being in origin a collection of materials from many different historical epochs and geographical centers, was never intended *in its origin* to be a complete law code for an entire people. From this purely historical datum Fox concludes—and here he

leaves the plane of historical analysis and takes the reader into his own myopic world—that anyone who attempts to live his life by these laws would find himself “in a hopeless muddle,” a viewpoint obviously not shared by observant Jews. Far more appealing to Fox are the “fine books” of the wisdom tradition, for they are seen as “simply ignoring Judaism... [making no] mention of its special practices nor its festivals.” Self-servingly, he recounts the story of a group of newly converted Jews living in Italy at the end of the Second World War. “At the end of the war,” Fox writes, “British soldiers visited them and told them of the Holy Land: they visited the new state of Israel, but like *true* Jews of the *Diaspora*, they were repelled by its rampant Zionism [emphasis added].” It seems unlikely that Mr.

Fox, by no accident a British citizen himself, is in any position to assess who is a true Jew, either in the Diaspora or within Israel itself.

The New Class Reconsidered

HIDDEN TECHNOCRATS: THE NEW CLASS AND THE NEW CAPITALISM. Edited by HANSFRIED KELLNER and FRANK W. HEUBERGER. With a Foreword by PETER L. BERGER. *Transaction Books*. 246 pp. \$29.95.

Reviewed by Alan Wolfe

ROUGHLY TWENTY YEARS ago social

ALAN WOLFE is the Michael Gellert Professor of Sociology and Political Science and Dean of the Graduate Faculty, New School for Social Research.

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ETHICS AND PUBLIC POLICY CENTER

scientists and intellectuals discovered the existence of a "new" class. Unlike the Marxist division of the world into bourgeoisie and proletariat—a division defined by each class's relationship to production—new class theory stressed control over the means of knowledge and information. Whether offered by conservatives or radicals, the fundamental idea was the same: professionals who knew how to use words and symbols were emerging as a crucial force in modern society.

There are good reasons why the theory of the new class never really caught on. For one thing, the new class was tied to the state, and everywhere around the world, states began to give way to markets. For another, new class theory was

closely related to ideas about post-industrial society, but with a worldwide recession starting in the 1970s, industry came back into favor. Thirdly—although this may be saying the same thing—the notion of the new class implied ideological dominance by the left, when in fact the crucial political issues of the past twenty years have increasingly come to be defined by the right.

For some of us, it was sad to see the idea of the new class go, and not only because those of us who write and teach are a part of it. There have not, after all, been all that many good ideas in the social sciences since the days of Marx, Weber, and Durkheim; for a while, the theory of the new class seemed to qualify as one of them. That is one of the reasons to welcome this new collection edited by Hansfried Kellner and Frank Heuberger: *Hidden Technocrats* tries to adjust new class theory to the political and economic realities of the past two decades. And in the process, the book develops a number of fascinating and important propositions.

CERTAINLY the most important of these propositions is that it makes little sense to identify the new class predominantly with left-leaning, public-sector, anti-industry bureaucrats. In their own chapter in the volume, Kellner and Heuberger demonstrate that business itself is increasingly given to new age consulting. The authors confess to being "astounded" by the amount of "emancipatory" and "inclusive" rhetoric they found in the world of business. (Such rhetoric also dominates the rhetoric of university administrators, but that is not so surprising.) It is a staple of contemporary social science—Marxist and conservative both—that business is, or ought to be, the locus of hard-nosed rationality and unsentimental decision-making. To find business executives preoccupied with "wholeness" and psychic health, usually to the dismay of unions, is indeed astounding.

A second important insight of this book is its redefinition of pro-

fessionalism. New class theory in the 1970s emphasized the importance of professions, but made few distinctions among them. By contrast, Kellner and Peter Berger, in their chapter, emphasize the distinction between professionals who attempt to master specific, narrow areas of expertise and the rise of new professionals more concerned with cultural and lifestyle issues. The old professions were conservative and limiting, nowhere better described, and advocated, than in the Weberian notion of *beruf*. Psychologically oriented new professionals—Jürgen Habermas' term for them is the therapeutocracy—are imperialistic, seeking to penetrate, and control, the inner souls of individuals. New class theory, Kellner and Berger observe, was correct to stress the importance of culture, but wrong to borrow the Marxist metaphor of class war. "What is shaping up is not a sharpening class war but rather a mutual cultural exchange," they conclude, and, "at the end of the day, it is not clear *who* is coopting *whom* in this somewhat surprising symbiosis."

Other chapters revise the concept of the new class even further, and so enhance its value. Anton Bevers and Anton Zijderveld examine what took place in Holland when cultural activists called for an expanded role of the state in promoting works of artistic expression. Unlike traditional social welfare programs, which offer benefits to the majority, a public policy that supports symphony orchestras and art museums will have difficulty winning popular legitimation. Although governmental support for cultural institutions increased dramatically in Holland, "the majority of the population now feels that the art world must manage on its own." The irony is that the expansion of the public sector brought about a situation not unlike the American reliance on the market. To protect their budgets, museums must organize blockbuster shows and turn to private donors for support.

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BERNICE MARTIN's essay begins with a contrast between Tom Wolfe's *The Bonfire of the Vanities* and David Lodge's *Nice Work*. Both are "new class" novels, exploring the ambiguities of work and power in a world dominated by the manipulation of knowledge. Those ambiguities are analyzed through a gripping report of interviews Martin conducted with young, workaholic executives who conduct "soft" social science research for marketing and advertising firms. Although their work resembles science, it is in fact a new vocation, one that relies on intuition and feel rather than validity and reliability. Once idealistic, they now approach their craft cynically: "No better than rape really," one of them comments about her work. Lifestyle radicals, they are protective of their own privacy, even while invading the privacy of consumers. Martin ends the story wondering what will happen to these "post-modern" individuals as they mature and are offered new positions in the corporate structure.

One arena in which the theory of the new class proved to be quite prophetic was in its prediction that cultural conflict would replace economic conflict as the dominant political fact of modern societies. James Davison Hunter and Tracy Fessenden explore the implications of this development by examining the rhetoric of "moral entrepreneurs," those who become political activists for moral change. Animal rights activists, anti-smoking crusaders, and euthanasia advocates share certain similarities, they argue. They must market their positions, assuming risks in the process. Although often critical of American society and its priorities, they must necessarily imitate the entrepreneurial character of that society if they are to succeed. Such new class activists ought not to be understood in opposition to capitalism, but as "a sector of the economy that is part and parcel of the evolution of American capitalism."

Because it is an edited volume,

the product of a research project at the Institute for the Study of Economic Culture at Boston University, *Hidden Technologies* cannot be read as the finished statement of a new theoretical breakthrough in our understanding of modern capitalism. It is, nonetheless, a significant work. Kellner and Berger see their story as one more proof of "the extraordinary resilience of modern capitalism." At a time when a new class is emerging in the former Communist societies—and in a way quite different from the pioneering analysis of Milovan Djilas—sociologists will have to pay more attention to the resilience of capitalism than they, in general, have. This book will give them plenty of food for thought.

The Cultural Middle Ground

THE MAKING OF MIDDLEBROW CULTURE. By JOAN SHELLEY RUBIN. University of North Carolina Press. 416 pp. \$34.95 cloth, \$14.95 paper.

Reviewed by John P. Sisk

WHAT Joan Shelley Rubin aims to do in *The Making of Middlebrow Culture* is "redress the disregard and oversimplification of middlebrow culture in the 1920s, 1930s, and 1940s by illuminating the values and attitudes that shaped some of its major expressions." Thus she lets us know at once where she stands with respect to the invidious rejection of the middlebrow by the likes of Dwight Macdonald, Clement Greenberg, and Virginia Woolf, none of whom shared Van Wyck Brooks' hope for a "genial middle ground" between highbrow and lowbrow, and all of whom shared a bias against the cultural fruits of democracy that is still politically correct in some quarters.

The attractive thing about this critical attitude was the ease with which it settled the question

JOHN P. SISK is Professor Emeritus of English at Gonzaga University.

whether the middle brow was really civilizable in any strict sense of the term. Even such assiduous civilizers as John Erskine, William Lyon Phelps, Stuart Sherman, and Will Durant sometimes had their doubts. But to their credit they acted against them, and given how easy it was, and still is, to be browbeaten by Greenberg's Manichean alternatives of avant-garde or kitsch, even ambivalent action could take a good deal of nerve. Since the action was so largely a matter of inducing midcult Americans to read the right books the right way, Ms. Rubin must revisit what for her older readers is familiar territory: that of the New Humanism and the genteel tradition; the Great Books programs of John Erskine, Mortimer Adler, Robert Hutchins, and Charles W. Eliot; The Book of the Month Club and The Literary Guild; the fabulously successful "outline" books of H. G. Wells, Will Durant, and Hendrik Van Loon; and such book programson commercial radio as "Information, Please!" and "Invitation to Learning"—to say nothing of the flamboyant journalism of Heywood Broun and Alexander Woollcott. In the process we discover that to observe America reading is an excellent way to see its most characteristic conflicts and tensions in operation.

THERE WAS, for instance, the ever-present fear that middlebrow culture (and ultimately America) was too enfeoffed to commerce and industry, and therefore too materialistic, to be open to the influence of great books. It was too willing to settle for useful information, for the prestige that came with a glib and superficial reporting of cultural events, and, as Edmund Wilson among other scolds complained, too happy with the relaxed critical standards communicated to it by its too complaisant teachers. Such instructional materials as The Book of the Month Club's selections, Durant's "stories" of philosophy and civilization, and Dr. Eliot's famous five-foot-shelf of clas-

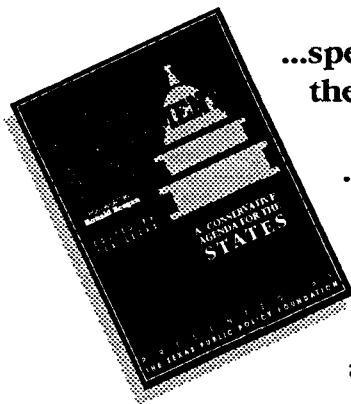
sics were big business for the publishers. Inevitably the latter welcomed the ministrations of the advertiser, who applied to books "promotional strategies apparently acceptable for selling pharmaceuticals and hosiery." Indeed, purist critics of midcult could find the perfect expression of everything they feared in the educational radio program "Information, Please!" Here a nationwide audience of culture-hungry "students" had an opportunity to stump one of the experts on the panel and, with the acclaim of a ringing cash register,

win five dollars.

And there was, of course, the fear that the canon of great books that was expected to do the civilizing (especially if read as assiduously as Mortimer Adler wanted them to be) might do more harm than good. Eliot's five-foot-shelf might reinforce the cultural prescriptions of Matthew Arnold and the New Humanism, but might not all those "dead, white," and largely European males constrict the American individual's search for a true self and an authentically lived life? Great books people like Stuart

Sherman, Will Durant, and John Erskine worried as much about this as they worried about the increasing consumerism, conformity, and specialization of American life. When university curricula were becoming more and more compartmentalized, thereby repeating and reinforcing the fragmentation of human experience, it did not follow that to read a good book was to read a good life: too much power was being taken away from the individual and concentrated in the hands of the experts. Hence John Dewey—a midcult civilizer but no friend of dead white males whatever their provenance—favored the student-centered curriculum.

STILL, the American individual needed to be taken firmly in hand lest the national enterprise fail. For some critics the vigorous pursuit of the consuming self in pre-World War II America pointed toward a culture of complaisant mediocrities. As Dorothy Canfield Fisher put it in 1927, "Our country is at this moment fighting for its life, at a turning point of its existence." Its strength and hardihood, stifled by a "multitude of mechanical comforts," was languishing in a "flabby moral ease." In other words, middlebrow culture lacked the sustaining character formation that was so much the concern of the genteel tradition and the New Humanism. Ms. Rubin very effectively ends her book on this note as she takes us back to the television quiz show "Twenty-One." Here Charles Van Doren, scion of a distinguished family of midcult educators, had to confess that he had won \$129,000 as an expert on a rigged program. There could have been no sadder indication of the consequences of confusing culture with information and entertainment—or, as Clement Greenberg put it in his influential 1939 *Partisan Review* essay "Avant-Garde and Kitsch," no better proof that between avant-garde and kitsch there could be no middle ground. "Today," Greenberg ends his essay, "we look to socialism *simply*



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FOREWORD BY
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for the preservation of whatever living culture we have right now." To anyone who wishes to understand middlebrow culture, this must be seen as the anachronistic oversimplification it is for Ms. Rubin. Inevitably, many of the figures in her book were at one time or another in partial agreement with Greenberg's position, and some even drifted leftward to the point where they could see no salvation for midcult but Marxcult. Like Dwight Macdonald, they joined, if only temporarily, such Communist-front groups as The League for Cultural Freedom and Socialism, which was committed to the belief that America and the USSR were "advancing by different paths to the same goals." When this kind of political correctness was combined with the doctrinaire perfectionism that spoils so much of our social criticism, it was easy enough for pessimistic purists to believe that midcult "was more harmful than mass culture because it was the enemy within the walls."

Fortunately, as this densely researched and gracefully written book makes clear, this was not generally the case. Ms. Rubin's people may on occasion have been too aware of themselves as a saving remnant and too ready to identify their own salvation with the saving of all the disadvantaged others. Now some of them can appear silly, muddleheaded, and even mean. One is nevertheless impressed with the overall seriousness and generosity of their efforts during this thirty-year period of social transition. Thanks to the author, we not only understand it better but also the no less transitional and troubled period in which we now live.

Getting the Name Right

SPEAKING THE CHRISTIAN GOD: THE HOLY TRINITY AND THE CHALLENGE OF FEMINISM. Edited by ALVIN J. KIMEL. Eerdmans. 334 pp. \$21.95.

Reviewed by David S. Yeago

IT IS AN INDEX of the success of this volume that one could read it with profit even if one were not very interested in the issue that provoked

DAVID S. YEAGO, a new contributor to FIRST THINGS, is Assistant Professor of Systematic Theology at Lutheran Theological Southern Seminary in Columbia, South Carolina.

it, the gender-feminist critique of Trinitarian language. That is to say, the authors, with very few exceptions, do not rely on denunciation and defensive generalizations, but take the current controversy as an occasion for renewed and deepened reflection on the specific theological issues at stake. The result is a volume that elevates the whole

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discussion to a new plane of seriousness, and makes a genuine contribution to theological understanding.

The essays themselves fall roughly into three groups. The first focuses on the questions of language and hermeneutics raised by the gender-feminist critique. Elizabeth Achtemeier and Roland M. Frye deal specifically with issues of biblical interpretation, while Garrett Green, Colin Gunton, and Janet Martin Soskice explore larger questions of metaphor and religious language. Not surprisingly, two of the essays (Green and Gunton) take aim effectively at the influential work of Sally MacFague.

A second group focuses directly on the Trinitarian doctrine and its implications. Robert W. Jenson provides a powerful sketch of the "Trinitarian understanding of the theological language" called for by editor Alvin J. Kimel in his essay. Gerhard O. Forde employs the resources of a Lutheran theology of the cross to argue the futility of attempting to reconcile ourselves to the hidden God by linguistic manipulation. Thomas F. Torrance gives a magisterial account of the theology of God the Father and the mystery of our knowledge of God, drawing on his profound appropriation of Athanasian theology. Thomas Hopko presents an Orthodox perspective, exploring the implications of the Cappadocian distinction between the unknowable divine essence and the three concrete persons of the Trinity. Joseph A. DiNoia applies the insights of Thomas Aquinas to provide a sophisticated and illuminating discussion of the grammar of Trinitarian language. Editor Kimel and Geoffrey Wainwright offer careful accounts of the grounds for traditional Trinitarian discourse, Kimel focusing on the implications of the biblical narrative, and Wainwright on the logic of Christian worship.

The third group of essays explores a variety of further issues at stake in the contemporary controversy. Elizabeth A. Morelli subjects

the notion of a distinctive "women's experience of God" to philosophical critique, and finds it wanting. David A. Scott and Ray S. Anderson discuss the implications of feminist proposals for the doctrine of creation (Scott) and Christology (Anderson). Blanche A. Jenson meditates on the losses, precisely for women, entailed in the subjection of the biblical narrative, in all its hard-edged oddity, to the demands of feminist theory. And Stephen M. Smith and Leslie Zeigler argue that there is a systematic and structural incompatibility between historic Christianity and radical feminism.

ALL THE ESSAYS are competent and interesting, but for my money the heart of the book is the second group, the contributions that address the Trinitarian doctrine directly. It is here that the profound issues at stake, which are more difficult to specify than knee-jerk polemicists on either side often assume, come most clearly into view. What is especially intriguing, moreover, is the observable *convergence* of these essays, despite incidental disagreements and the very different strata of Christian tradition on which they draw, towards a point of intersection that is difficult to describe but seems to be very near the heart of the mystery whose herald and sign the historic church has claimed to be.

A few examples will give a sense of this convergence. Jenson describes the church's "primary Trinitarian talk" as "dense signs," sacramental gifts that enable a present participation in the heavenly liturgy: "It is throughout eternity that we will be initiated into the pattern of the life among the divine Three; if we are now able to shape our liturgy by the 'begetting' and 'sending' constitutive of that life, it can only be that we are permitted to trace a life not yet of this world."

For Torrance, our knowledge of God is only possible by "sharing in some way in the knowledge which God has of himself":

Thus our knowing of God rests not on a center in ourselves but on a center in God, not on the ground of our own being, but on the ground of God's being. Our ability to know him is grounded not in some capacity of our own but in the activity of God in opening himself to our knowing and actually making himself known to us through his Word.

This becomes definitively actual in the historical particularity of Jesus of Nazareth: "In Jesus we encounter the very *EGO EIMI* of God, so that in him we are summoned to know God in accordance with the way in which he has actually objectified himself in our human existence and communicated himself within the structure and modes of our human knowing and speaking."

Hopko argues that the Trinitarian name is never transcended in the Greek Patristic tradition, even in its most severely apophatic representatives, because that name marks precisely the point at which the God who is unknowable in his essence has made himself known as *person* through his co-essential Son and Spirit.

By contemplating, participating in, and imitating the saving activity of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in the *oikonomia* of creation, salvation, and deification, human persons can discover what it means for them to be men and women, fathers and mothers, husbands and wives, brothers and sisters in the image and likeness of God the Father revealed through Christ the Son in the Holy Spirit, who makes creation to be God's bride, the wife of the Lamb, and whose presence in the church is already the anticipatory pledge . . . of the "Jerusalem above" which is "free" and is "our mother" (Gal. 4:26).

Likewise for DiNoia, the concrete Trinitarian language is bound up with the gift of the triune God's very self, "the incorporation of created persons into personal communion with the uncreated Trinity." Only God himself can provide language appropriate to this mystery:

Just as God is the first teacher of Trinitarian truth, so also is it God who provides the first lesson in Trinitarian grammar: "When we cry 'Abba! Father!' it is the Spirit himself bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God" (Rom. 8:15-16). . . . The speakability of the otherwise unspeakable mystery of the triune God presupposes the gift of God's very self and depends on resources that come with that gift.

"No considerations of any kind," he writes, after a lengthy and sympathetic critique of various revisionist proposals, "can be advanced that would warrant the revision of the language in which the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit invite us to speak with them."

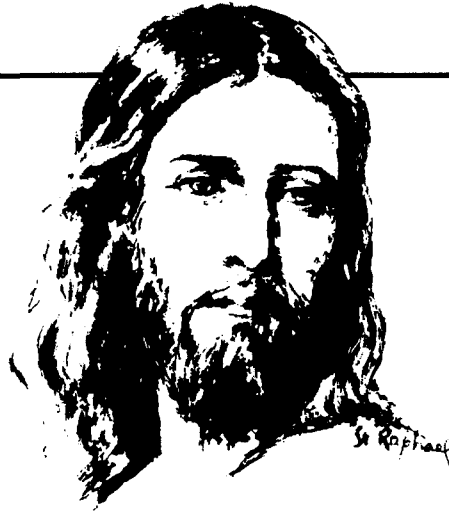
THE POINT TOWARD which the essays converge, therefore, is the mystery of the concrete, contingent, and radical self-giving of the Trinitarian God who is utterly beyond us, a self-giving accomplished in the life and destiny of a particular first-century Palestinian Jew and made accessible to us in "sacramental" language and rite that are themselves an integral part of that self-giving. The doctrine of the Trinity is itself the attempt to articulate the structure of this mystery, whose distinctive logic is evoked by talk of incarnation and sacrament, self-giving and self-revelation. Christian identity, the essayists all suggest, is most deeply constituted by orientation to this central mystery, and this is what is at stake in the contemporary debate.

Cumulatively, these essays suggest two related insights about that

debate: first, that it has very little to do, in a certain sense, with feminism, and second, that it is perhaps best understood as only one particular battle in a conflict that has been going on for quite a long time.

The book as a whole can be read as a demonstration that the revision

of Trinitarian language has no intrinsic relationship to the core ethical and political concerns of feminism. Its authors show no signs of harboring reactionary views of the ontological and social status of women (Jenson, indeed, has argued elsewhere for the onto-



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logical *superiority* of women), and there is every reason to believe that feminist moral and cultural concerns could be creatively accommodated within the classical Christianity that they defend. In this light, contemporary theological gender-feminism comes to seem, not the inevitable theological expression of feminist concerns, but rather the *co-option* of those concerns by something else, by a distinct religious and philosophical agenda that could in principle stand on its own, with or without the feminist connection.

Several contributors note the close similarity of gender-feminist accounts of religious language to the projection-theory of Ludwig Feuerbach, and others point out the similarities between certain feminist theologians and the Hellenistic and Gnostic critics of Christianity in late antiquity. The real confrontation in this book, it would seem, is not between Christian orthodoxy and the moral and social concerns of feminism, but rather between the Christian orientation to the concrete self-giving of the wholly other God and a very different religious orientation that regards the very idea of divine concreteness, particularity, and contingent givenness as inevitably oppressive to the human spirit.

IT MIGHT BE WORTH pointing out that it is precisely at this point that orthodox Christianity and traditional Judaism agree most deeply at the formal level even while they disagree at the material level. Christians and Jews agree, that is, that the God of Abraham enters into contingent relations with human beings through concrete elections at particular times and particular places. Israel is chosen, and not, say, the Edomites; the Lord is available to his worshippers on Mt. Zion, and not on the high places; the particular books of the Torah are his word, to be pondered day and night, and not just any uplifting literature. The single important disagreement between Christians and Jews has to do, of course, with the

material claim that Christians make concerning the role of Jesus of Nazareth in the Lord God's contingent relations with humanity—and that is, to be sure, quite a disagreement. But the agreement on the formal level means that orthodox Christianity and traditional Judaism fall under gender-feminist critique for much the same reasons and in much the same way. There is room for significant Christian-Jewish theological conversation here.

This observation leads up to the second insight suggested by *Speaking the Christian God*: that the present controversy is simply the latest stage in a debate that has been going on in the Western world for quite some time. It seems quite probable that when the tale of this debate is told in time to come, it will be seen as one more episode in the story of the *one* great debate at the heart of modern Western theological history, a story whose earlier chapters include the Deist and Idealist rejection of "positive religion," Newman's search for an alternative to "liberalism," the Modernist controversy in Roman Catholicism, Barth's lifelong conflict with the heritage of neo-Protestantism, the German Church-Struggle of the 1930s—and so on.

Speaking the Christian God is evidence that this protracted controversy has at least brought increasing clarity. The authors of these essays have all profited from the lessons of the last two or three centuries, not least from the great renewal of Trinitarian reflection that has been perhaps the greatest achievement of twentieth-century theology. The mystery that is the focal point of Christian identity seems to be coming ever more clearly into view, beyond the sterile defensive strategies to which an alarmed orthodoxy has too often resorted. The present volume thus offers an ecumenical dividend: in our context, what divides the Cappadocians, Aquinas, Luther, and Barth begins to seem less interesting and significant than what

unites them, perhaps best summed up in the prayer of St. Catherine of Siena to the Trinity, cited by DiNoia: "O abyss! O eternal Godhead! O deep sea! What more could you have given me than the gift of your very self!"

BRIEFLY NOTED

COVENANT OF LOVE: POPE JOHN PAUL II ON SEXUALITY, MARRIAGE, AND FAMILY IN THE MODERN WORLD. Edited by RICHARD M. HOGAN and JOHN M. LEVOIR. *Ignatius Press*. 328 pp. \$14.95 paper.

For those who have had enough of the dull and deadly conformism of recent decades, a manifesto for a sexual revolution that is truly revolutionary.

CHURCH AND STATE IN EARLY CHRISTIANITY. By HUGO RAHNER. *Ignatius Press*. 324 pp. \$16.95 paper.

Although written before Vatican Council II, which dramatically developed Catholic teaching on church-state relations, this fine historical treatment of the subject from the second through eighth centuries, now reissued, is of lasting value. Rahner (elder brother to Karl) concludes with a firm endorsement of the views of Ambrose of Milan, who cautioned the Church against too cozy a connection with the emperor and had high praise for the merits of being persecuted.

ISLAMIC DA'WAH IN THE WEST: MUSLIM MISSIONARY ACTIVITY AND THE DYNAMICS OF CONVERSION TO ISLAM. By LARRY POSTON. *Oxford University Press*. 220 pp. \$29.95.

In the West today, Muslims do not have the option of missiology by military conquest. Poston examines alternative forms of mission activity and the characteristics of those who are being converted to Islam.

WHAT DOES THE LORD REQUIRE? HOW AMERICAN CHRISTIANS THINK ABOUT ECONOMIC JUSTICE. By STEPHEN HART. *Oxford University Press*. 253 pp. \$24.95.

The Christian thinkers favored by Hart favor forms of economic democracy that he describes as "in some sense socialist." We should put people ahead of profits, and so forth and so on. The argument and, one fears, the author are caught in a time warp. Too bad, for the question of the title remains as urgent as ever.

THE DEVALUING OF AMERICA: THE FIGHT FOR OUR CULTURE AND OUR CHILDREN. By WILLIAM J. BENNETT. *Summit*. 271 pp. \$20.

In a manner informed and forceful, the former Secretary of Education cuts through the smog obscuring the culture wars in which our society is embroiled. School choice, sexual mores, and the connections between religion and morality all come in for illuminating attention. A book to pass on to neighbors and take up in discussion groups.

THE ETHICS OF ST. AUGUSTINE. Edited by WILLIAM S. BABCOCK. *Scholars Press (Emory University)*. 189 pp. \$29.95 paper.

Outside the biblical canon, nobody is so perennially pertinent as Augustine. In this book of seven solid essays, especially outstanding are "Cupiditas and Caritas: The Early Augustine on Love and Human Fulfillment," by the editor, and "Human Sexuality in the History of Redemption" by Paul Ramsey.

PARISHES THAT EXCEL. By PATRICK J. BRENNAN. *Crossroad*. 130 pp. \$13.95.

A priest in charge of evangelization for the Archdiocese of Chicago offers a sympathetic treatment of, inter alia, "church growth" models associated with Protestant "mega-

churches." Evangelization employing "marketing" techniques is much criticized by the more theologically thoughtful. It might be of considerable significance if the much-discussed pitfalls could be avoided in the Catholic context.

THE ROLE OF RELIGION IN THE MAKING OF PUBLIC POLICY. Edited by JAMES E. WOOD and DEREK DAVIS. *J. M. Dawson Institute of Church-State Studies (Baylor University)*. 256 pp. \$9.95 paper.

Nine essays providing a reliable overview of the title subject. Allen Hertzke's evaluation of mainline/oldline churches since 1945 is especially insightful.

20TH CENTURY THEOLOGY. By STANLEY GRENZ and ROGER OLSON. *InterVarsity Press*. 393 pp. \$19.99.

A helpful overview of theological figures and currents in this century, written from an evangelical Protestant perspective by two thinkers much indebted to Wolfhart Pannenberg. A reliable and recommended introduction.

THE AMERICAN COMMUNIST MOVEMENT: STORMING HEAVEN ITSELF. By HARVEY KLEHR and JOHN EARL HAYNES. *Twayne*. 210 pp. \$24.95.

A brief but solid and informative history of the movement, its institutional tentacles, and its friends and enemies. Only a few years ago the book might have been controversial. Now it is a welcome documentation of "idealisms" and "idealists" gone horribly wrong.

REFUSE TO STAND SILENTLY BY. Edited by ELIOT WIGGINTON. *Doubleday*. 430 pp. \$25.

An "oral history of grass roots social activism" from the 1920s to the 1960s. Pete Seeger, Studs Terkel, and more than a dozen friends

explain why they have been so courageous for so long.

A NOBLE DEATH: SUICIDE AND MARTYRDOM AMONG CHRISTIANS AND JEWS IN ANTIQUITY. By ARTHUR J. DROGE and JAMES D. TABOR. *HarperCollins*. 203 pp. \$25.

Every once in a while a book appears that is truly pernicious in its wrongheaded use of scholarship. The authors put their undoubted learning to the purpose of fudging the distinctions between suicide, martyrdom, and euthanasia. Augustine, in their telling, is the villain who turned Christians against the idea of "the right to die." Little wonder that the book carries a warm recommendation by Derek Humphry, the infamous founder of the Hemlock Society. Erudition in the service of propaganda.

THE SECULARIZATION OF EARLY MODERN ENGLAND: FROM RELIGIOUS CULTURE TO RELIGIOUS FAITH. By C. JOHN SOMMERVILLE. *Oxford University Press*. 227 pp. \$39.95.

Sommerville, author of "Why the News Makes Us Dumb" (*FT*, October 1991), is Professor of History at the University of Florida. He argues that secularization developed in England from 1500 to 1700 as alternative vocabularies emerged for explaining and, to some extent, controlling reality. At that point, being religious became a matter of faith, even choice. The emergence of the heretical imperative (Peter Berger) was much earlier than is usually supposed.

REDISCOVERING THE SACRED. By ROBERT WUTHNOW. *Eerdmans*. 178 pp. \$8.95 paper.

A prolific sociologist of religion offers, as the subtitle has it, "perspectives on religion in contemporary society." The subtitle and substance of the book are generic, but always with the nuance and caution for which Wuthnow is noted.

Richard
John
Neuhaus

The Public Square

A Continuing Survey of Religion and Public Life

The Innovationist Edge

Civilization, it has been observed, depends upon obedience to the unenforceable. Similarly, it depends upon the observance of the unexamined. The Lutheran ethicist Gilbert Meilaender once wrote a brilliant essay titled “The Examined Life Is Not Worth Living” (in *The Theory and Practice of Virtue*, Notre Dame). His argument had to do with, inter alia, virtue as both gift and achievement, and how the things that are most important to living a good life elude our sure analytical grasp. Marriages, families, and friendships work best when we are not constantly scrutinizing their inner works. When examined, dissected, and reduced to contractual agreements, they are already in very deep trouble. The same is true of cultures and churches.

Even if they never heard of Edmund Burke, most sensible people are Burkeans. They are disposed to trust their intuitions, moral sentiments, and commonsensical experience as these are embedded in, and reinforced by, the communities in which they live. That is one reason why it can be such fun to be a cultural revolutionary. Defiance of custom and radical innovation take people by surprise. The innovator not only has the frisson of being revolutionary, but he can indulge the conceit of being intellectually superior since he has examined what others take for granted. “Give me three good arguments against incest,” he challenges. And his poor interlocutor has to admit that he really hasn’t given the matter that much thought. The fact that decent people have always thought incest a very bad thing does not count as a good argument.

A Few Sane People

In the New York City public school system at present a few sane people are desperately trying to come up with arguments in support of their belief that there is something radically wrong with teaching fourth graders the excitements of anal and oral sex—homosexual and heterosexual—accompanied by graphic illustrations and the

doctrine that children have a “civil right” to sexual gratification according to their own preferences. Critics of this pedagogical advance complain that it is a radical departure from tradition, to which proponents answer that that is one of the best reasons for doing it. Critics say it offends the beliefs of parents, to which proponents say (sotto voce) that parents with children in the public schools are almost all poor and marginal and have been safely ignored for decades. Critics claim the program violates community standards, to which proponents triumphantly respond, “Community standards in New York City?” Enough said. Complaint dismissed. You might as well nestle down in the handbasket and enjoy the ride.

As in the culture, so also, mutatis mutandis, in the churches. Unlike incest and anal sex for nine-year-olds, the innovations here do not necessarily appear as direct assaults on traditional truth, and people of good faith and intelligence can and do disagree on the merits of such changes. As in the culture, however, there are dynamics that give the proponents of innovation the edge. It sometimes takes a long time for churches to pull themselves together in order to make a convincing response to proposed innovations. This has been the case with artificial contraception, mainly among Catholics, and with women’s ordination in those churches that did not promptly embrace the innovation when it became culturally attractive about twenty years ago. In a most instructive and scholarly work, *Humanae Vitae: A Generation Later* (Catholic University of America), Janet E. Smith writes that the Catholic Church was ill-prepared to make a convincing case against contraception. That explains, in part, why Catholics were so shaken when numerous moral theologians and others rejected the teaching of the 1968 encyclical.

Until the Anglicans broke with it at the Lambeth Conference of 1930, the Christian tradition had been virtually unanimous in teaching that contraception is morally wrong, as

John Noonan documented in his authoritative study, *Contraception*. By the 1960s, many Catholics, encouraged by developments around the Second Vatican Council, hoped that change in the Church's teaching was only a matter of time. Their great disappointment with *Humanae Vitae* was understandable. Fr. Andrew Greeley, among others, has argued that the encyclical has, more than any other one thing, undermined confidence in the Church's teaching authority. It may be more accurate to say that the widespread dissent from the encyclical, notably in Catholic academic circles, did the undermining.

Without mentioning Greeley, Smith agrees that the impact on effective teaching authority was enormous. One reason for this, she notes, is that the encyclical was taken as the occasion not for examining contraception but for advancing a larger agenda. "There was little true examination of the arguments of *Humanae Vitae* itself," she writes. "Most of the debate immediately following the issuance of the encyclical focused on the status of the encyclical as infallible or authoritative, on the role of conscience and the legitimacy of dissent. Nor did the theologians later often take up the issue of contraception itself; rather, they questioned all the more radically the very principles on which the teaching on contraception and indeed the teaching on all moral matters has been traditionally based."

John Paul II has vigorously and repeatedly reaffirmed the teaching of *Humanae Vitae*, although casting the argument in a more "personalist" philosophical framework that is less reliant on natural law arguments for a necessary connection between the unitive and procreative dimensions of sexual intercourse. Smith acknowledges that the Church is not yet beyond the initial shock of widespread dissent from *Humanae Vitae*, and it may be a long time before more pastorally effective arguments are mounted. "In the perspective of Church history," she writes, "the debate about contraception is relatively new. Until recent decades there had been no serious challenge to the Church's teaching on contraception. It is not unusual in the history of Church teaching on a given topic for the conclusions to precede the arguments and for a development of the arguments in support of a teaching to await the stimulus of dissenting objections." On most important questions, it might be observed, conclusions precede arguments. Just as life precedes the examined life. And, if we are fortunate, survives it.

Our Issue for Controversy

Similar factors inform and deform the debate over women's ordination. Some proponents of the

innovation seem to suggest that the failure to ordain women was the result of a two thousand year spasm of absent mindedness, or because earlier Christians were "culturally conditioned" in a way that we enlightened folk are not. Here, too, conclusions precede arguments, or at least they precede arguments that persuade the advocates of change. That is among the points made in a collection of essays published some years ago, *Women and the Priesthood*, edited by Fr. Thomas Hopko of the Orthodox Church of America.

In his concluding essay, Hopko leaves no doubt as to what he thinks is at stake in the debate. "The question of women and the priesthood is but one important instance of what I see to be the most critical issue of our time: the issue of the meaning and purpose of the fact that human nature exists in two consubstantial forms: male and female. This is a new issue for Christians; it has not been treated fully or properly in the past. But it cannot be avoided today. How we respond to it, I believe, clearly demonstrates what we believe about everything: God and man, Christ and the Church, life and death. It is, in a manner of speaking, our particular issue for controversy: our gnosticism or Arianism, our Origenism or iconoclasm. It is the issue of our time, the issue that inevitably comes to every age and generation 'in order that those who are genuine . . . may be recognized' (I Cor. 11:19). It is our controversy for judgment."

Some readers may object that Fr. Hopko's rhetoric is inflated, but keep in mind that for the Orthodox, as for Catholics, the question of women and the priesthood implicates theological truths in a way very different from those communions that have a less sacramentalized understanding of ordered ministry. Then too, as he says, women's ordination is not an isolated question but engages fundamental understandings of male and female in creation, church, and culture. Few who have been involved in this discussion in the several churches would be inclined to disagree with Fr. Hopko on that score. Both proponents and opponents of ordaining women recognize that it has to do with much more than whether women are functionally competent to do what was previously done only by men. There is no denying that many women are a great deal more competent than many men.

But Hopko's essential point is closely related to that of Smith and Meilaender, having to do with the connections between conclusions and arguments, between life and its examinations. "It is," writes Hopko, "not a task of discovering *what* the truth is—it is rather the task of articulating and explaining it in proper theological language and concepts. It is the perennial theological task of finding the 'words adequate to God.' Just as the Church *knew* the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit to

be equally divine and praiseworthy, but required centuries to forge the proper and convincing formulation of the dogma of the suprasubstantial Trinity, so, it seems to me, the Church *knows* what she believes and practices concerning men and women in the life of the Church, including the priesthood, but it appears certain that it will take years of theological labor for her to arrive at a fitting dogmatic statement to explain and defend it."

The Future of Tradition

However people may differ on contraception, the ordination of women, and efforts to redefine the meanings of male and female, they can recognize the difficulties posed in defending what is given by tradition—in making the case for obedience to the unexamined and the unenforceable that, when challenged, must be examined and somehow enforced. The difficulties are intensified in a culture that is obsessed with "change" and what is "new." Precisely because something is given by tradition, it is suspect. Admittedly, this neophiliac disposition is more pronounced among intellectuals and the purveyors of advanced thought in the knowledge class. After all, status among their peers depends upon their being "creative," which is to say "innovative."

Relatively few thinkers understand it to be their task to provide an intellectual defense of the wisdom of tradition. To voice the possibility that our grandparents may have been as smart as we are is to invite the awful fate of being called a conservative.

Effective resistance to innovation, when one is convinced that resistance is called for, requires courage and imagination. It also requires being embedded in a community that has an identifiable history that is sustained by authoritative claims to truth. Among Christians today, it would seem that Orthodox and Catholics have such a community, although it is very much under attack from within and without. And so do many conservative Protestants who, while eschewing the idea of authoritative tradition, hold firmly to that part of the tradition that is the inspired Scriptures. As for American culture, it is increasingly hard to believe that it has a sustainable story. The ravages of "multiculturalism," plus courts that make up the law as they go along, plus an establishment of middle-aged juveniles who cheer on the unbridled vandalism of "creativity" in history, literature, and the arts—all combine to unravel whatever story America once had.

Of course, as the man said, it ain't over until it's over. While it is increasingly hard to believe in a sustainable American story, one has a duty to try. For Jews and Christians, who are part of a much

greater and longer story, the doing of that duty is neither onerous nor marked by desperation. Unlike those who are in thrall to the imperious now, they have the assurance that they have all the time that there is, and that it is all time toward home. In that confidence, they exercise the courage to conserve, and to reform in order to conserve. And they are not at all intimidated by the not so awful fate of being called conservatives.

FT

LIFE AFTER TELEVISION

To say that someone is an enthusiast is, to our way of thinking, not necessarily a compliment. And George Gilder is sometimes given to getting carried away with his enthusiasms. In a new little book, *Life After Television*, he extols a future of fiber optics and telecomputers that, he declares, "can renew our entire culture." "The telecomputer," he says, "will enrich and strengthen democracy and capitalism all around the world." Why, he asks, doesn't the information technology that we have now better inform and uplift us? "This," says Gilder, "is the most important question of the age."

His hyperbole might put off some readers. That would be a shame, since Gilder has a strong record of enthusiasms that have been subsequently vindicated. His *Sexual Suicide* (an argument updated in *Men and Marriage*) was one of the earliest and most devastating critiques of radical feminism, while *Wealth and Poverty* anticipated by a decade much of today's thinking about market economies and the plight of the urban underclass. A more recent book, *Microcosm: The Quantum Revolution in Economics and Technology*, describes "the overthrow of matter" in the production of wealth in a way that is also theologically suggestive. (This writer draws on Gilder's argument in *Doing Well and Doing Good* [Doubleday 1992] in explaining Pope John Paul II's contention that human ingenuity is the chief, and inexhaustible, economic resource.) That Gilder should be theologically suggestive is by no means accidental. He is a Christian (Episcopalian) of serious intent.

Gilder insists that the U.S. has a strong lead in communications technology but is in danger of frittering it away in a misguided competition with the Japanese over high density television (HDTV). Television, Gilder and others claim, is a thing of the past. The future belongs to telecomputers linked by fiber optics, a technology that will give

us almost infinite variety in the production and distribution of programming. If true, the prospect has far-reaching implications also for religious programming and the ways in which the churches communicate their messages. Many of the technical details of *Life After Television* quite thoroughly elude this technologically illiterate writer, but the possibilities limned seem both persuasive and attractive.

Obstacles to Progress

Gilder has an unflinching view of the way in which the existing television imperium works, or doesn't work. To take advantage of the present media, "the artist usually has to make a Faustian deal. . . . He must bow to the lowest terms of mass appeal. Then he must join the queue for access to the limited number of video-entertainment channels. Television acts as a severe bottleneck to creative expression, driving thousands of American writers and creators into formulaic banality or near-pornographic pandering. The current system dictates that thousands of writers and directors labor to supply a few channels and distributors and that few of America's best TV and motion picture artists regularly have their work produced. Rather than creating original works, most TV writers merely fill in the blanks of formatted shows, contriving shocks and sensations to satisfy a mass audience. . . . The very nature of broadcasting means that television cannot cater to the special interests of audiences dispersed across the country. Television is not vulgar because people are vulgar; it is vulgar because people are similar in their prurient interests and sharply differentiated in their civilized concerns."

The existing production and distribution pattern is no better with movies. "All right," says Gilder, "let's go to the movies. There are 50 theaters within driving distance, but they are showing only 10 movies. Five of them are for teeny-boppers or perverts. Two are comedies about men and babies. One is about corrupt cops, call girls, and drug runners. You have already seen the other two. Perhaps one was worth the effort. The same requirement of achieving mass appeal that afflicts TV also restricts films to a few vulgar themes or sure-fire sensations." With fiber optics and the telecomputer all this changes, according to Gilder. Of course, nearly unlimited programming alternatives may increase the incidence of the yet more perverse and dehumanizing, but that, Gilder suggests, is the price we pay for the freedom to multiply programs of artistic and moral excellence. The key thing is to break the monopoly of the network and cable systems that dictate and thereby constrict what is on offer.

A Hope for Change

The logic of both the market and technological change is on the side of the revolution that Gilder describes, or so he contends. This does not mean that the revolution is not meeting with powerful counterrevolutionary resistance. He cites a passage from Machiavelli's *The Prince*: "It must be remembered that there is nothing more difficult to plan, more doubtful of success, nor more dangerous to manage than the creation of a new system. For the initiator has the enmity of all who would profit by the preservation of the old institutions and merely lukewarm defenders in those who would gain by the new ones." That master of management, Peter F. Drucker, opines that no new system can displace an established one unless it outperforms it by a factor of ten. "Otherwise, the established system will have enough money, momentum, expertise, legal clout, capital plant, installed base, and satisfied customers to hold off the new concept."

Although he is optimistic, Gilder does not discount the possibility that the combined obtuseness of government regulators and business-as-usual corporate officers could fend off the revolution—at least for several decades. There is reason to hope, however, that Gilder's more sanguine reading is right. If he is right, the days of the pervasive and chiefly corrupting influence of television and the movies are numbered. We very much doubt that this will mean the renewal of our culture, however. Human nature has demonstrated an impressive capacity to devise new instruments of corruption. Then there is the additional worry, voiced by some, that there may come a time when the communications and entertainment media will be so diverse that there will no longer be any sense of a "national community." That, in our judgment, is a risk well worth taking, considering that the alternative is a national community whose styles and standards are defined by ABC, NBC, CBS, CNN, and Hollywood.

We share with Gilder the prejudice that the risk of diversity is the risk of democracy. In the New Media Order that is projected, millions of people will no doubt continue to favor the banal and debased. But, all in all, we have more confidence in the cultural and moral judgments of ordinary Americans than of their putative betters in a media industry that exploits a largely captive audience to secure its great wealth and power. Call that populism if you must, but it reflects an informed respect for the remarkable resilience of most people who have gone on living more or less sensible lives despite three decades of sustained assault by a media peerage that makes no secret of its disdain for quotidian virtues. We don't know if George Gilder is right about what is going to happen in the next few years, but we rather hope

that he is. (*Life After Television: The Coming Transformation of Media and American Life* is published by Norton, 126 pp., \$14.95.)

FT

AN ESTABLISHMENT IN TRAVAIL

It has been observed that radical environmentalism is a replacement enthusiasm for people abandoned by defunct Marxist causes. This is evident also in reports coming out of the "Earth Summit 92" held in Rio de Janeiro. Paul Wee, a Lutheran World Federation veteran enthusiast of almost every leftist fever that has afflicted this fevered century, has taken the demise of Marxism in stride without skipping a beat. The real action at Rio was not at the meeting of world leaders, he writes, but at the "Global Forum" where hundreds of NGOs (non-governmental organizations), many church-related, celebrated the resurrection of utopian dreams. He praises Maurice Strong, Secretary General of UNCED (UN Conference on Environment and Development), who recognizes that the NGOs are the driving force not only of environmentalism but "of the United Nations itself."

As with radicalisms past, the Global Forum heaped blame on the "first world," and especially on the U.S., for the "environmental oppression" of the poor of the world. The eco-enthusiasts drew up "alternative treaties" to those debated by world leaders, calculating in one treaty that the North owes the South \$25 trillion for damage to the ozone layer alone. The "lamentation, anger, and passion" of those at the Global Forum, writes Wee, was led "by very articulate individuals and groups who needed no convincing as to either the legitimacy of their cause or their right of access to the political forum." We have no doubt. The movement also has its ready-made martyrs. "A number of those present carried in their bodies the scars of environmental and political oppression. Some who had the courage to give public testimony returned home fearing for their own safety." There can be no feel of an authentic revolution without the waving of the bloodied shirt.

And so some church bureaucrats desperately sniff about for discontents to be exploited in order to maintain their posture of "prophetic witness" against the real or imagined powers that be. At least some of them no doubt do believe that they

are playing the role of "fools for Christ," as distinct from plain fools. Which is occasion for mentioning that, in the immediate aftermath of the Los Angeles riots, the Geneva-based World Council of Churches announced that it was dispatching a task force to study racial oppression in the United States. Their report is awaited with an undetectable level of anticipation. In response to the Los Angeles bloodlettings, the head of the National Council of Churches called for a "Marshall Plan" for our cities, and a notably progressive Catholic bishop was widely reported as declaring that the events were a "wake-up call for America" to abandon its racism and address the "root causes" of poverty. Catchy phrases, those. With such inventiveness does religious leadership make its distinctive contribution to our public discourse.

Most contemporary religious pronouncements on social issues are so easy a target that one almost feels guilty in drawing attention to them. It was not always so. Historian William King ("The Reform Establishment and the Ambiguities of Influence") argues that, after World War II, a secularized social gospel movement in Protestantism lost its transcendent sense of justice and became much more ideological and political in the partisan sense. He attributes this turn, in large part, to the influence of the Presbyterian layman, John Foster Dulles, who enlisted the oldline churches for the anti-Communist cause. He also thinks that the churches declined into being but one partisan political voice among others when they emphasized the "representative" rather than "prophetic" character of their witness. This, King believes, was a mistake since it was apparent to almost all that there was a growing gap between the leadership and the local churches.

It may be that Dulles and others were responsible for "ideologizing" the oldline churches at one point, albeit in the eminently worthy cause of anti-Communism. But King's analysis would seem to overlook the degree to which the earlier, presumably less secularized, social gospel movement was very much enlisted in causes easily locatable on the political spectrum. More to the point, it was perhaps predictable that churches that served a dominantly centrist political agenda in the 1950s would, almost naturally, adjust themselves to serving the dominant and "radicalized" agenda of the 1960s. The principle, as oft-stated in a slogan of the time, was that "the world sets the agenda for the church." The world changes (or at least that part of the world to which church leaderships pay attention) and so the church must change in order to stay in step.

King is certainly right in noting the tension between being "prophetic" and being

“representative.” For decades, the oldline churches (and their agencies such as the World and National councils) claimed that their “prophetic” witness was institutionally authorized by their constituencies as expressed through the process of representative democracy. Prophecy by majority vote was never a very plausible concept. In more recent years, the church-and-society curia (and it is one curia, cutting across denominational lines) has tended to abandon the claim to being representative and, along with it, has abandoned accountability to the church constituencies. As a result, the groups involved have been abandoned by their constituencies. Despite severe budget cutbacks, and despite the fact that almost nobody is paying them attention, a remnant (they would no doubt say “faithful remnant”) can still raise the price of an air ticket to events such as the Global Forum and can still grind out unread press releases proposing radical remedies for the putative root causes of myriad discontents.

The King essay is in a book edited by William R. Hutchinson, *Between the Times: The Travail of the Protestant Establishment in America* (Cambridge). The title suggests that the present doldrums of the oldline are not forever. We all have reason to hope that that is the case. It seems unlikely, however, that any of the variations on the social gospel themes, from the late-nineteenth century onward, provide a useable past to guide the future. A recent study of the Presbyterian Church (USA) indicates that church membership decline is attributable to a basic ignorance of and indifference toward Christian doctrine. The question is not whether leaderships should be representative or prophetic but whether they are, in any serious sense, Christian. It is, in sum, a crisis of faith.

The “travail” analyzed in the Hutchinson book will soon become the death throes of oldline Protestantism unless there is a conversion to teaching elementary Christian truth claims. Without that, leaderships will continue to expend their energies either on desperate “restructurings” aimed at institutional self-preservation or on prophetic posturings that give the churches the satisfaction of feeling that they are useful to whatever utopian spasms have seized the elite culture at the moment. Or, most likely, on both.

FT

THE PROBLEM WITH “VALUES”

Martin Diamond was a political philosopher at the University of Chicago and a mentor to some of the most sensible folk today thinking about the nature of politics. He died as a relatively young man in 1977, but one of those sensible folk, William A. Schambra, have now put together a first-rate collection of Diamond’s essays, *As Far as Republican Principles Will Admit* (American Enterprise Institute, 405 pp., \$34.95). Here, for example, is some wisdom on the connection between values and facts: “Thus the arbitrary element—so important to the modern usage regarding ethical and political values—was always implicit in the traditional term. But as far as I can tell, the word values was never used hitherto to mean *opinions of justice or the common good*. And that is precisely the change that was wrought: questions of justice were transferred from the realm of opinion to the realm of ‘values,’ which is to say, from the realm of the partly rational to the realm of the wholly arbitrary. Treating justice under a term heretofore reserved for material things and their conventional values proved an extremely effective rhetorical ploy, because whether applied to commodities or to justice, the word value persuasively implies that neither the commodities nor justice have any intrinsic merit, but only what men subjectively and arbitrarily attach to them. Indeed, when applied to justice, the word came to imply a wholly arbitrary matter; after all, everyone always knew that most commodities have some objective, intrinsic worth.

“Values being thus understood, there is naturally a radical distinction between facts and values. The word value rhetorically prejudices the case and settles all the important questions before they can even be asked. For example, hear how the term *value judgment* settles the matter: a value judgment is a judgment made as to whether one likes or dislikes certain facts, but only *after* the facts have already been considered. The very term presupposes and thus seems to confirm that facts and values belong to different realms—facts are accessible to scientific reason, while values belong to the ‘noncognitive’ realm of interests and passions.”

To say that there is no truly value-neutral analysis is not to suggest that all values are equal. We have, Diamond believed, the capacity and responsibility to distinguish between the rational and the rationalizing, between the sound and the foolish, between the fraudulent and persuasive. No matter what the subject matter, values come into play and should be dealt with openly and rationally. He illustrates the point: “When

political scientists analyze patterns of aggressive behavior or the question of violence, they presuppose knowledge of what the right behavior is, that is, behavior that is neither aggressive nor timid but just right; one might almost say they presuppose knowledge of a sort of Aristotelian mean. Analysis of ghetto riots and of 'backlash' similarly presupposes normative knowledge. For example, riot behavior has to be discriminated into categories of ordinary criminality and political militancy; that is, the behavior has to be judged as either self-seeking or vicious, or as justifiable and manly wrath. And what happens to the fact-value distinction when the very word backlash means an unjustified or excessive hostility or punitiveness? For example, in a survey study of backlash, every characterization of a respondent would involve a normative judgment. In short, all important empirical analyses of behavior rest upon tacit value premises; and if the value premises can have no objective validity, neither can the empirical conclusions. You can't tell one factual datum from another without a normative score card."

 FT

MOTHER GOD

"Inclusive language" in God-talk is all the rage. Sociologist Andrew M. Greeley suggests that critics are making much ado over very little. He points out that survey research he has done indicates that a third of Americans picture God at least equally as Mother and Father, and 12 percent "think of Her more as Mother than Father." He goes on to note that medieval theologians such as Anselm and Bernard realized that all language about God is metaphorical and therefore had no problem speaking of God as father, mother, sister, brother, knight, and king. Well, yes and no. Many Americans at their prayers and Anselm writing his books are hardly engaged in the same enterprise as radical feminists pushing their "re-imagining" of God.

It is not the fault of the latter if we do not understand by now that their revolutionary intention is to overthrow the putatively oppressive patriarchalism of historic Christianity. They have been telling us this in no uncertain terms for more than two decades. We should do them the courtesy of believing that they want to do what they say they want to do. The assumption is that religious language is a social construct that can be re-imaged in order to conform to our experience

and advance the struggle for liberation from sexist hegemony. Of course Fr. Greeley's truism is true, that all God-talk is metaphorical. Metaphorical does not mean arbitrary or infinitely malleable, however.

Orthodox Christians believe that "Father, Son, and Holy Spirit" is the name of God. Much like Mary Smith is the name of Mary Smith. God has revealed that as the name by which He is to be addressed. We may talk about Mary Smith as a rock, a martini, or a raccoon, but the most accurate thing to say about Mary Smith is that she is Mary Smith. This is not to deny that talk about God, and to God, is metaphorical. It is to recognize, with the Great Tradition of Christianity, that some metaphors happen to be true. Fr. Greeley opines, "The imagery one chooses to use when picturing God and dialoging with Him ought to be a matter of personal taste." No doubt some people will go on picturing God as a kindly grandmother, a cosmic engineer, a seductive lover (male or female), or protective cop, and there is no necessary heresy in that. The Church, however, does not picture God according to taste but proclaims God according to revelation—as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

 FT

WHILE WE'RE AT IT

■ Addressing a conference on the Human Genome Project held in Houston, John Habgood, the Church of England's Archbishop of York, warned against exaggerating the genetic determination of personal human characteristics. "The fact that we share 98 percent of our genes with chimpanzees does not mean that there is only a 2 percent difference between being chimpanzee and being human," he observed. One of the most striking characteristics of human life is its openness, he said. "All of us live, whether we believe it intellectually or not, as if we were free to create our own future." As to whether a person should be told of his genetic abnormalities, Dr. Habgood suggested that "it is probably wisest to know the best or worst about one's genes, provided the information can be properly interpreted, and provided there is a proper recognition of the inherent limitations of this knowledge." Those told that they are subject to genetic risks "need to be aware of the danger of spreading an unnecessary blight over their lives. . . . There is also the danger of being seized by a belief in genetic determination which then becomes self-fulfilling. . . . One of the

blacks are thinking in an era that has passed by the radical shuffles of the old civil rights and black power establishments there is *Issues & Views*. A free copy is available by writing P.O. Box 467, New York, NY 10025. . . . David H.C. Read and Walter J. Burghardt, S.J., are two veteran preachers of note (one Protestant, one Catholic) and they have just come out with the premier issue of *The Living Pulpit*. It is definitely worth a look, especially by our clergy readers who are engaged in the impossible glory of preaching regularly. For information write *The Living Pulpit*, 5000 Independence Avenue, Bronx, NY 10471.

■ Governor William Weld of Massachusetts declared at a press conference that, if a pro-choice bill permitted abortions through the ninth month of pregnancy, that is a "price I would pay in order to have government stay out of the thicket." Within two weeks a full-page advertisement in the *Boston Globe* carried a statement written by Prof. Mary Ann Glendon of Harvard Law School and signed by more than four thousand women. The final paragraph puts the matter nicely: "Now about the imperial 'I.' It is not you, Governor Weld, who will pay the price for that ninth-month abortion. A little boy, or, more often, a little girl will pay with his or her life, and don't delude yourself that the end will be painless. The price will also be paid by the second victim of every abortion—the child's mother, often a woman who feels abandoned, helpless, and frightened. Don't you have anything better to say to that woman, Governor, than that she has the right to kill her own unborn infant? If not, your abortion legislation is just a new edition of an old male message to women faced with a crisis pregnancy: 'Get rid of it, honey, I'll pay the price!'"

■ There is no denying that clergy and other public scolds fell in love with *Habits of the Heart*. For whatever reason, the more recent offering of the Robert Bellah team, *The Good Society*, has not met with such a favorable reception. Bellah, who is a gentle man, thought our review of the first volume (*Public Interest*, Spring 1986) was "somewhat churlish," and it is true that we had stiff reservations about the thesis and the way it was argued. But that review was a veritable rave compared with a scathing essay in *Society* (May/June 1992) in which Andrew M. Greeley dissects both volumes. Greeley convincingly shows that the data do not support, indeed they contradict, the Bellah claim that Americans are distinctively "individualistic," "selfish," "consumerist," and so forth. As for the institutional reforms proposed in *The Good Society*, there is, says Greeley, a vast literature on subjects such as poverty and education of which the authors appear to be appallingly ignorant. Greeley concludes with the hope that Bellah & Co. will modify their approach in order to take account of the facts that

are, however imperfectly, known, but he does not expect that to happen. "But to modify one's strategy in such a fashion in response to the data would mean that one would have to admit that individualism and commitment are not necessarily contradictory and that they can co-exist in the same society and in the same person. It would mean to abandon the high ground of moral self-righteousness with which one condemns other Americans. It would mean that one would have to give up the pose of passionate zeal with which one calls Americans to repentance. One would have to stop whining and start discussing. I am not sure that Robert Bellah and his co-authors are willing to modify their style. I am even less persuaded that their enthusiastic admirers would do so. It is too much fun beating other Americans over the head with the club of your commitment and their individualism."

■ In a wide-ranging article on how the left and right in the Catholic Church reinforce one another's worst propensities, the editor of *Commonweal*, Margaret Steinfels, has this aside on matters liturgical. "The traditionalists have their Tridentine Mass; they have Latin—and bless the Lord, they don't have to look at a clerical face; meanwhile among the revolutionists there are non-clerical Eucharists and non-Eucharistic liturgies. A recent flier sent to the *Commonweal* office inquires: 'Looking for a community to celebrate Eucharist? Join us at our women's center for a safe place to pray . . . with fun-spirited people'—date and time are given, but, sorry, no liturgy on April 19, Easter. Is that the day everyone goes to a fake liturgy or an unsafe place—without fun-spirited people?"

■ John D. Hartigan, a prominent New York lawyer active in the fight against condom distribution in the schools, has written an informative little booklet, "What Parents and School Officials Need to Know About Curbing Teenage AIDS Infection." It is available for \$1.75 from The Catholic Campaign for America, Suite 404, 905 16th Street NW, Washington D.C. 20006.

■ "The problem of the black underclass is a problem that will only be solved one by one and from the inside out." That's black political scientist Glenn Loury, a frequent contributor to these pages, as quoted by Midge Decter in a *Commentary* article on the aftermath of the Los Angeles riots. The chattering classes couldn't get enough of "anger and rage" as the explanatory factor, indeed the justifying factor, behind criminal behavior on a massive scale. Ted Koppel's "Nightline" gave thugs from L.A. gangs a platform to explain that they have no alternative to mugging, stealing, killing, and impregnating girls with babies for whom they accept no responsibility because the unemployment rate is so high, and anyway George Bush did the same thing in the Gulf War. The wisdom of Loury's

their stance toward Israel has become “more critical.” While a majority of readers agree that Israel holds a special place in the future of God’s kingdom, only 24 percent agree that “the biblical mandate is for Christians to support the state of Israel.” Reasons given for the declining support include efforts by EMEU and others to foster closer relations between Palestinian Christians and religious leaders here. It is also noted that there is a decline in “dispensational” theology, which emphasizes the restoration of Israel as a condition for the coming of the End Time. Others say that there is a new “progressive dispensationalism” emerging that is less “land-centered” and “future-centered” than earlier dispensationalisms. An additional factor, it is reasonable to think, is a correlation between evangelical and more general public opinion that has tended to side with the Bush administration’s harder line on questions such as Israeli settlements in the occupied territories. Despite the purported decline, evangelical Protestantism continues to provide what may be the single most important non-Jewish source of support for Israel in this country.

■ Americans United for Separation of Church and State—the institutional bellwether of extreme separationism—has done a survey of its membership. According to retiring executive director Dr. Robert Maddox, AU is “religiously diverse.” Fifteen percent of the members are Jewish, 10 percent are Seventh-day Adventists, 9 percent are Unitarians, and 13 percent Christian Scientists. What Dr. Maddox does not say is that this means that 47 percent of AU members are drawn from religious groups that add up to a little over 2 percent of the population. “Religiously diverse” is not the phrase that would occur to most observers. The other finding from the survey is that the membership is very old. Dr. Maddox puts a brave face on this, noting that “many of our members are retired and have spare time to read up on church-state issues or get involved locally.” He also notes the obvious, that without younger members there will be nobody “to defend the wall of separation during the next century.” We do not worry about that. There will always be, for whatever reflective or cranky reasons, extreme separationists. But one may hope that they will be marginal to our public debates, more so even than Americans United is marginal today.

■ There’s a big publicity campaign for Thomas Moore’s *Care of the Soul: A Guide for Cultivating Depth and Sacredness in Everyday Life* (HarperCollins). This book is bad enough to become a best-seller. Moore says he was a monk for some years but is now a “lapsed Catholic.” He has apparently lapsed into a rather genial form of paganism premised upon the insight that

polytheism makes for happiness. Kierkegaard said that purity of heart is to will one thing, whereas Moore declares that singleness of heart or mind is the curse of curses. “The most rewarding quality of polytheism is the intimacy it can make possible with one’s own heart. Whenever we try to keep life in order with a monotheistic attitude—do the right thing, keep up the traditions, make sure life makes sense—our moralism against ourselves can keep certain parts of our nature at a distance and little known. . . . An attitude of polytheism permits a degree of acceptance of human nature that is otherwise blocked by single-mindedness.” Moore says he is offering a “fiction of self-help” that will never be understood by people who are hung up on the question of truth. The ever perspicacious Paul Mankowski comments in *The World & I*: “For all its talk of depth and mystery, *Care of the Soul* is a shallow book for shallow people: those who have either given up the struggle for integrity or have never embarked on it. It is written for a world in which there is no evil, only inappropriate dogmatism; no wrong choice, only insufficient appreciation for the down side of each choice. It is a world in which the main terror is boredom. There can be no true profundity in this world; it deals with the surfaces of things. It is incapable of comprehending suffering; it has no natural sympathy for another’s pain. Jesus, Moore tells us, with a staggering obtuseness, ‘has a melancholy side, epitomized in his agony in the garden.’ This is a universe of boundless self-absorption, of a solipsism which deadens rather than quickens perception, a world incurious of tragedy and, consequently, incapable of joy.”

■ Tolerance is breaking out all over. Albert Ellis of the Institute for Rational-Emotive Therapy, New York, writes in *American Psychologist*, the journal of the mammoth American Psychological Association, that he has been badly misunderstood. He does not believe that “religiousness is irrational and equivalent to emotional disturbance.” Dr. Ellis is given to making fine distinctions. “I think I have made it quite clear in my writings that religion, in its usual definition, is not irrational nor disturbance creating but that what I call *devout religiosity* tends to be emotionally harmful. I define devout religiosity as pietistic, rigid, dogmatic belief in and reliance upon some kind of supernatural, divine, or ‘higher’ power and as strict obedience to and fanatical worship of this hypothesized power.” Lukewarm religion that does not take too seriously the human projection called “God” can be quite harmless to mental health. The problem comes with people who “tend to assume that some deity and this deity’s commands at least in part control their actions.” Such fanatics will also “feel compelled to choose paths that their supreme

being views as correct," thus limiting the range of "choice" in their lives. In coping with stress, they "will be inclined to ignore irreligious stress strategies (e.g., indulgence in sex and other pleasurable forms of relaxation) and resort mainly to prayer and religious rituals." Dr. Ellis is quite prepared, however, to give a clean bill of mental health to those whom he describes as "open-minded religionists" who take care not to offend against the orthodoxy of the denomination called Rational-Emotive Therapy. That such sturdy primeval specimens as Albert Ellis survive and flourish in the American Psychological Association a century after William James is powerful testimony to the human mind's resilience under the assault of thought.

■ Controversy continues to swirl around Josemaria Escrivá de Balaguer, the founder of Opus Dei who died in 1975 and was beatified by John Paul II on May 17. A January story in *Newsweek* raised major questions both about the personal sanctity of "The Father" and about the alleged rapidity with which his "cause" had been advanced by the Holy See. Now Robert Moynihan, editor-in-chief of *The Catholic World Report*, has done a searching examination of the objections that have been posed and arrives at what strikes us as a sober and sensible judgment regarding Opus Dei and its founder: "It seemed to me that Opus Dei was a powerful institution of the Church, founded by a charismatic, hard-driving Spaniard under conditions of persecution, which has expanded steadily over the years due to the loyalty, unity, intelligence, and Christian commitment of its leaders and members. It had won little favor under Paul VI, prompting understandable irritation from Escrivá and other in Opus Dei who disagreed sharply with the excesses they perceived in the post-Council years. But it had come back into favor under the present pontiff, who found its discipline, doctrinal orthodoxy, and personal loyalty praiseworthy and useful. I was persuaded that there is no 'deep, dark secret' at the heart of Opus Dei, simply a profound, if very Spanish, Catholic faith. But it also seemed to me that Opus Dei's perceived conservative style had aroused suspicions and some enmities even within the Church, and that the triumphal progress of beatification was a case in point."

■ The fear of "hate literature" is spreading in Middle Europe, including Poland. Should, for instance, Hitler's *Mein Kampf* be freely available? Polish historian Adam Michnik answers in the affirmative. He says he keeps *Mein Kampf* and the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion* side by side on his shelf and thinks it better that they be sold in editions with critical introductions than disseminated under the counter in raw form, as is

the case in Germany. "We are wiser because of Auschwitz and Katyn," Michnik concludes. "This is why we must read the writings of Hitler and Stalin and the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion* in critical editions. . . . We must know what ideas and words lead us to kill men. I repeat: read Hitler, read Stalin."

■ In another publication we recently did a whimsical little piece occasioned by a politically correct manifesto issued by The Magickal Child, a Manhattan store specializing in things demonic. In response to which comes a blast from one who styles himself as "The Reverend Peter H. Gilmore, Administrator, Church of Satan." He is unhappy with us for many reasons, not least because our article suggested that Satanists, proponents of goddess worship, and neo-pagan stone fetishists are all part of the same phenomenon. Doctrinal distinctions are in order, according to the Rev. Gilmore. "In fact, these so-called 'pre-Christians' reject any connection with Satan, and rightly so as they share the appalling doctrine of altruism espoused by Judeo-Christian and humanist 'thinkers.' Satanism rejects these idealistic and unnatural creeds to embrace the world as it is: a ground for endless strife and struggle, a total war wherein the strong dominate the weak and the clever dominate the strong. We Satanists are our own Gods and consider Satan to be a symbol for the carnal nature of Man unleashed, as well as the dark force which permeates all of existence and fuels the evolutionary advancement of life itself." Now if only more of our churches were so clear about what they stand for.

■ Bishop John Shelby Spong strikes again. Coming out from HarperCollins is *Born of a Woman: A Bishop Rethinks the Birth of Jesus*. The biblical lie that Mary was a virgin, says Spong, has done awful things to our culture. In addition, "the female aspect of God so long oppressed by the masculine patriarchy is roaring back into our awareness, sweeping away our male prejudices and even our male definitions of the ideal woman." Redefining God is one thing, but redefining the ideal woman is really getting serious. This also has roared into the bishop's awareness: "Only the church that manages to free itself from its sexist definition of women, anchored significantly in the virgin Mary tradition, will survive." That, presumably, explains why orthodox churches are going down the tubes while Episcopalianism is flourishing.

■ "A healed relation to each other and to the earth calls for a new consciousness, a new symbolic culture and spirituality. We need to transform our inner psyches and the way we symbolize the interrelations of men and women, humans and earth, humans and the divine, the

divine and earth. Ecological healing is a theological psychic-spiritual process. . . . We must see the work of ecojustice and the work of spirituality as interrelated, the inner and outer aspects of one process of conversion and transformation." For more of the same, see *Gaia and God: An Ecofeminist Theology of Earth Healing* by Rosemary Radford Ruether (HarperCollins). (The above is not, repeat not, a parody.)

■ We don't know how many readers follow the horses, but some may remember that Pat Day was the jockey who rode Lil E. Tee to victory in the Kentucky Derby. The *Wall Street Journal* story included this: "But Day, who is conspicuously religious, said he 'always knew there'd be a Derby with my name on it,' and that it would come 'in God's good time.' " We're not sure that God picks winners in the Derby, but to be "conspicuous" about one's convictions sounds like a compliment that we all might covet.

■ Chuck Colson of Prison Fellowship doesn't claim to be on top of every new wrinkle in the popular culture, but he and his wife Patty did finally get around to watching the video of Kevin Costner's *Dances with Wolves*. Costner brings bad news to his Indian brothers: more white men are coming. How many? they ask. Costner points to the star-packed skies above their campfire. "As many as the stars," he says. Colson comments: "Few Christians could miss the biblical phrasing. But here the allusion to the glorious Abrahamic covenant is big, bad news—perhaps the film writer's not so subtle way of saying that the Judeo-Christian civilization is the real enemy." A few months later, he and Patty decide to watch Costner's *Robin Hood*, figuring that nobody could mess up that tale. They discovered otherwise. "The old story has some new twists. The heroine is no maiden in distress, but a nineties-style 'Ms.' Marian. Friar Tuck is a drunk whose Christianity is depicted as the same superstitious ignorance that fueled the tragic and bloody Crusades from which Robin has just returned. The modern version also has a new hero: Azeem, a Muslim Moor. Repeatedly, Azeem gets to demonstrate the superiority of Muslim culture to the skewed Christianity of Crusade-era England. In one scene, Friar Tuck solemnly pronounces that a woman in difficult childbirth must die; it is God's will. Azeem quietly delivers the baby by Caesarean section. There is no Muslim in the original story. What's Azeem doing in Sherwood Forest? . . . Well, maybe as a class, white males aren't allowed to look good in the nineties. Western culture is painted with a broad brush as giving us the imperialists who killed the infidels in the Crusades and oppressed Native Americans here. . . . Never

mind those little Western contributions like democracy. No, it is the Muhammed-inspired Muslims and the pantheistic Native Americans who are the real good guys. . . . I have talked to Christians who dismiss my concerns as merely the ravings of a white sixty-year-old male who sees bogeymen behind every bush in Sherwood Forest. Maybe. But it's better to point to the wolves dancing in sheep's clothing than to sit by and watch while the flock is ravaged."

■ Muslims in America now feel sufficiently "at home" that they are prepared to engage in the social activism that is a mark of religion in this country. That, at least, is the claim of *The Minaret*, a publication of the Islamic Center of Southern California. Its "Agenda for the 90s" focuses on abortion, euthanasia, AIDS, sex education in the schools, drugs, and homelessness. Maher Hathout, chairman of the Islamic Center, says that Muslims have been "introverted" in the past but now "immorality has taken over and the silent majority has to speak." The behavior of Muslim young people has, says Hathout, shattered the illusion that they are immune from the pathologies of the culture. "Muslims don't want to impose their morality on others," he says reassuringly, "but we don't want others to impose their immorality on us either." Arab Muslims, according to Hathout and others, are taking cues from American black Muslims on how to cooperate with black churches in contending for their moral agenda. It seems improbable that Richard Nixon had Arab Muslims in mind when he first talked about the silent majority more than twenty years ago, but then what's a majority for if it can't welcome another minority?

■ For people who want to keep up with what is being taught, and what will be taught, in the country's public schools, the *Social Studies Review* is an invaluable resource. Published by the American Textbook Council (475 Riverside Drive, New York, NY 10115), the review is studiously nonpartisan, although the authors are obviously restraining themselves in their evaluations of materials being pushed by radical feminists, black studies advocates, and sundry multiculturalist enthusiasts. Increasingly politicized textbook adoption procedures in a few key states pretty well determine what will be taught America's children, or at least those children who have no choice but to attend government schools.

■ Of the many independent newspapers of a conservative bent that are being published on campuses around the country, *Peninsula*, put out by students at Harvard, is surely one of the best. For a sample copy write them at P.O. Box 2180, Cambridge, MA 02238. . . . Those who want to stay on top of what bright and (mainly) younger

blacks are thinking in an era that has passed by the radical shuffles of the old civil rights and black power establishments there is *Issues & Views*. A free copy is available by writing P.O. Box 467, New York, NY 10025. . . . David H.C. Read and Walter J. Burghardt, S.J., are two veteran preachers of note (one Protestant, one Catholic) and they have just come out with the premier issue of *The Living Pulpit*. It is definitely worth a look, especially by our clergy readers who are engaged in the impossible glory of preaching regularly. For information write *The Living Pulpit*, 5000 Independence Avenue, Bronx, NY 10471.

■ Governor William Weld of Massachusetts declared at a press conference that, if a pro-choice bill permitted abortions through the ninth month of pregnancy, that is a "price I would pay in order to have government stay out of the thicket." Within two weeks a full-page advertisement in the *Boston Globe* carried a statement written by Prof. Mary Ann Glendon of Harvard Law School and signed by more than four thousand women. The final paragraph puts the matter nicely: "Now about the imperial 'I.' It is not you, Governor Weld, who will pay the price for that ninth-month abortion. A little boy, or, more often, a little girl will pay with his or her life, and don't delude yourself that the end will be painless. The price will also be paid by the second victim of every abortion—the child's mother, often a woman who feels abandoned, helpless, and frightened. Don't you have anything better to say to that woman, Governor, than that she has the right to kill her own unborn infant? If not, your abortion legislation is just a new edition of an old male message to women faced with a crisis pregnancy: 'Get rid of it, honey, I'll pay the price!'"

■ There is no denying that clergy and other public scolds fell in love with *Habits of the Heart*. For whatever reason, the more recent offering of the Robert Bellah team, *The Good Society*, has not met with such a favorable reception. Bellah, who is a gentle man, thought our review of the first volume (*Public Interest*, Spring 1986) was "somewhat churlish," and it is true that we had stiff reservations about the thesis and the way it was argued. But that review was a veritable rave compared with a scathing essay in *Society* (May/June 1992) in which Andrew M. Greeley dissects both volumes. Greeley convincingly shows that the data do not support, indeed they contradict, the Bellah claim that Americans are distinctively "individualistic," "selfish," "consumerist," and so forth. As for the institutional reforms proposed in *The Good Society*, there is, says Greeley, a vast literature on subjects such as poverty and education of which the authors appear to be appallingly ignorant. Greeley concludes with the hope that Bellah & Co. will modify their approach in order to take account of the facts that

are, however imperfectly, known, but he does not expect that to happen. "But to modify one's strategy in such a fashion in response to the data would mean that one would have to admit that individualism and commitment are not necessarily contradictory and that they can co-exist in the same society and in the same person. It would mean to abandon the high ground of moral self-righteousness with which one condemns other Americans. It would mean that one would have to give up the pose of passionate zeal with which one calls Americans to repentance. One would have to stop whining and start discussing. I am not sure that Robert Bellah and his co-authors are willing to modify their style. I am even less persuaded that their enthusiastic admirers would do so. It is too much fun beating other Americans over the head with the club of your commitment and their individualism."

■ In a wide-ranging article on how the left and right in the Catholic Church reinforce one another's worst propensities, the editor of *Commonweal*, Margaret Steinfels, has this aside on matters liturgical. "The traditionalists have their Tridentine Mass; they have Latin—and bless the Lord, they don't have to look at a clerical face; meanwhile among the revolutionists there are non-clerical Eucharists and non-Eucharistic liturgies. A recent flier sent to the *Commonweal* office inquires: 'Looking for a community to celebrate Eucharist? Join us at our women's center for a safe place to pray . . . with fun-spirited people'—date and time are given, but, sorry, no liturgy on April 19, Easter. Is that the day everyone goes to a fake liturgy or an unsafe place—without fun-spirited people?"

■ John D. Hartigan, a prominent New York lawyer active in the fight against condom distribution in the schools, has written an informative little booklet, "What Parents and School Officials Need to Know About Curbing Teenage AIDS Infection." It is available for \$1.75 from The Catholic Campaign for America, Suite 404, 905 16th Street NW, Washington D.C. 20006.

■ "The problem of the black underclass is a problem that will only be solved one by one and from the inside out." That's black political scientist Glenn Loury, a frequent contributor to these pages, as quoted by Midge Decter in a *Commentary* article on the aftermath of the Los Angeles riots. The chattering classes couldn't get enough of "anger and rage" as the explanatory factor, indeed the justifying factor, behind criminal behavior on a massive scale. Ted Koppel's "Nightline" gave thugs from L.A. gangs a platform to explain that they have no alternative to mugging, stealing, killing, and impregnating girls with babies for whom they accept no responsibility because the unemployment rate is so high, and anyway George Bush did the same thing in the Gulf War. The wisdom of Loury's

observation, writes Decter, is difficult to deny. She concludes: "Difficult—but not, it would appear, impossible. For not even a quarter of a century of failure has been enough to dislodge the belief that society at large must furnish the means—the magic program or school curriculum or legal reform—to make everything all right for the black underclass. And the reason this belief cannot be shaken when it comes to blacks is that giving it up for them would force the liberal culture to give it up for everyone else as well.

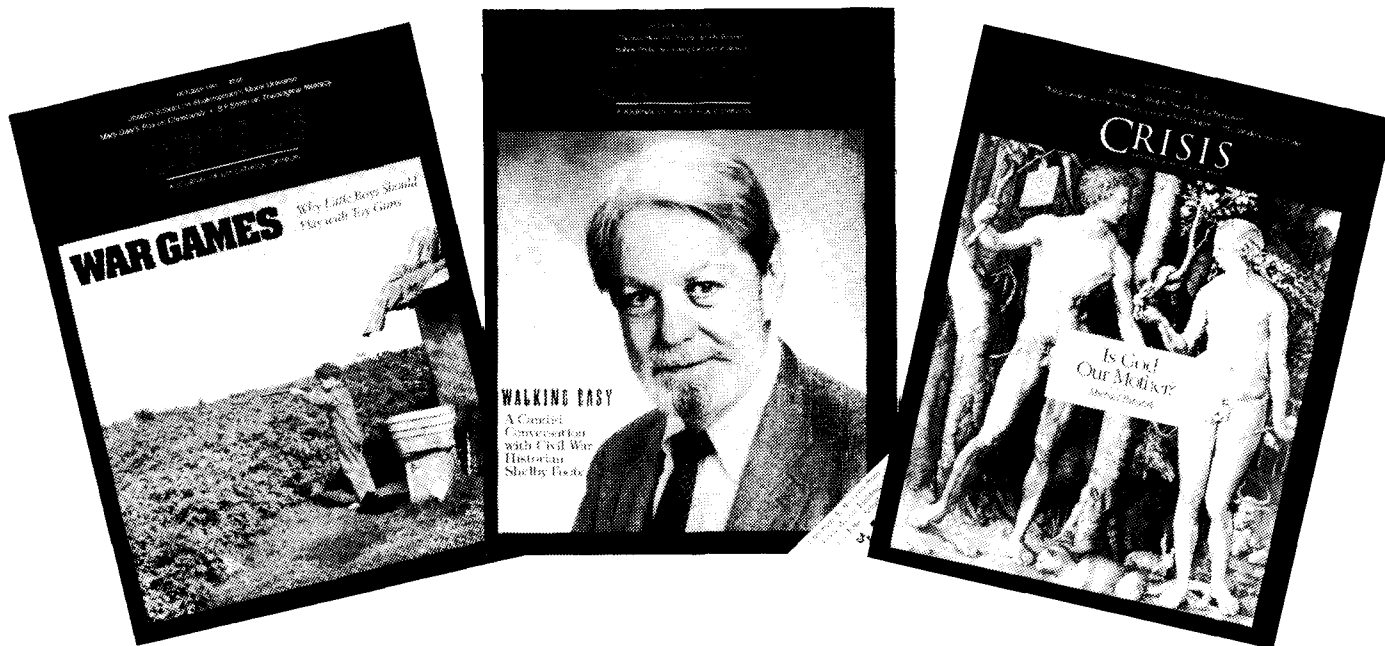
"Assuming responsibility for one's life, for one's everyday choices as well as for one's moral conduct, is a practice that has been eroding in American life for a long, long time: every private weakness is by now regarded as a legacy of parental misbehavior, every discomfort as an injustice, every wrong turn as an enforced imposition from outside, every defeat as a malfunction of the system. From something as fatal as AIDS to something as nebulous as acquaintance rape, the slightest suggestion that the consequences might be connected with one's own behavior has become anathema.

"This is what accounts for the absurd hue and cry over Vice President Dan Quayle's disapproving remark about the decision of a TV-sitcom heroine to have a child out of wedlock. Full-page headlines were devoted to this attack on Murphy Brown by the Vice President; talk-show guests shouted at one another about it. People attempted to charge Quayle with triviality, but their very passion in doing so belied their intention. Quayle was suggesting that both the producers and the more privileged consumers of American popular culture have a house of their own to put in order. But this stuffy message, which is to say, this truth, is what the main managers of our public discourse can least bear to hear—never mind the cost to those poor blacks whose interests they have for so long and with such self-exculpating gratification appointed themselves to serve."

■ In a generally favorable review of the first volume of the papers of Martin Luther King, Jr., Eugene D. Genovese offers a number of intriguing asides on liberal theology. In the review, Genovese suggests that Dr. King was more theologically conservative than many have assumed, and therefore he was politically radical. That is to say, King recognized that original sin sharply limited the human capacity to respond to moral appeals, and therefore more forceful (although not violent) measures were required to advance justice. Along the way of his review, Genovese notes that the Southern "Agrarian" poet John Crowe Ransom published in

1931 a stinging rebuke of liberalism titled *God Without Thunder*. Ransom's point was that a God who does not thunder can hardly command our reasonable worship. Genovese reflects: "When years ago, I finished reading *God Without Thunder*, I threw it aside, muttering that I would rather burn eternally in hell than submit to the will of such an arbitrary, not to say monstrous, God. But then, as an atheist, I am at liberty to indulge in such grandstanding. Were I in grace and in fear of the wrath of a God who proclaims himself 'a jealous God,' I would think again. Liberal (and liberationist) theology, in white or black, should warm every atheist's heart. For if God is a socially conscious political being whose view invariably corresponds to our own prejudices on every essential point of doctrine, he demands of us no more than our politics require. Besides, if God is finite, progressive, and Pure Love, we may as well skip church next Sunday and go to the movies. For if we have nothing to fear from this all-loving, all-forgiving God, how would our worship of him constitute more than self-congratulation for our own moral standards? As an atheist, I like this God. It is good to see him every morning while I am shaving."

Sources: Paul Wee on the Earth Summit in Rio, *Lutheran World Information*, 1992. Andrew Greeley on inclusive language in the *Wall Street Journal*, May 27, 1992. On the Human Genome Project, *The Tablet*, 4 April 1992. John Updike on John Cheever's *Journals* in *The New Republic*, December 2, 1991. Jared Kass quoted on religious experience, *Washington Post*, March 11, 1992. John Chancellor on Gulf War casualties, "NBC Nightly News," March 12, 1992. On declining Evangelical support for Israel, *Religion Watch*, April 1992. Membership survey of Americans United for Separation of Church and State, *Church & State*, February 1992. Albert Ellis on religion in *American Psychologist*, March 1992. Adam Michnik on hate literature, *The Catholic World Report*, May 1992. Christopher Lehmann-Haupt review of Robin Lane Fox's *The Unauthorized Version*, *New York Times*, May 11 1992. On Pat Day's religion, *Wall Street Journal*, May 4, 1992. Chuck Colson on the depiction of white males in contemporary films, *Christianity Today*, April 27, 1992. Muslims and silent majority, *Religion Watch*, May 1992. Gov. Weld on abortion, and Mary Ann Glendon reply, in the *Boston Globe*, May 6 and May 20, 1992. Margaret Steinfels on liturgies in *America*, May 2, 1992. Midge Decter, "How the Rioters Won," *Commentary*, July 1992. Eugene Genovese on God, *The New Republic*, May 11, 1992.



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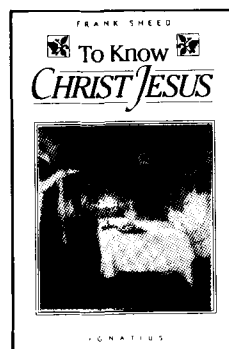
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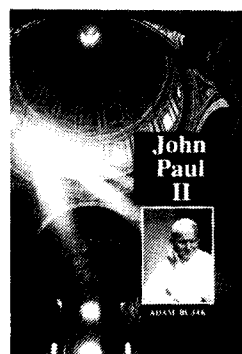
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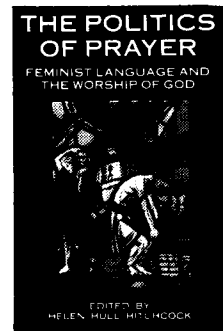


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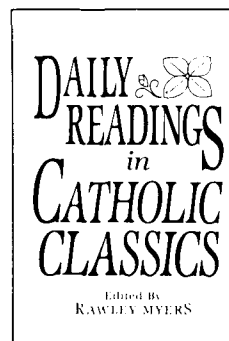
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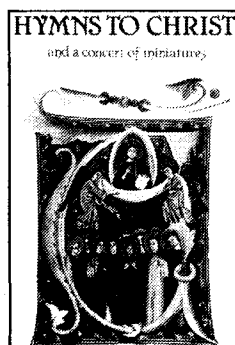
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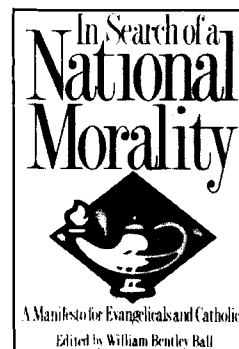


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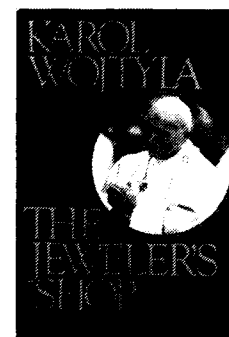
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